UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE SEMIOTICS OF SUBTEXT IN MODERN DRAMA

BY

JOANNE EILEEN HORWOOD

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE SEMIOTICS OF SUBTEXT IN MODERN DRAMA submitted by JOANNE EILEEN HORWOOD in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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April 17, 1993

To

Mom and Dad
Shannon and Gerald
Torben and Michaela
and Jay

Thank you to all of the family, friends and colleagues without whose support, in the form of everything from emotional encouragement to babysitting to proof reading, I would have been unable to complete this.

ABSTRACT

In a 1962 speech to the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Pinter addressed a central issue in his plays: "So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken." There is a "language, where under what is said, another thing is being said." The complexity of communication is a major theme in twentieth-century literature. In drama, this interest gives rise to a new phenomenon called subtext. Historically, playwrights generally wrote in a declarative manner: their characters explained their actions, wishes, intentions, motivations either to each other or to the audience in soliloquies and asides. However, a growing awareness of the complexities of the individual and of his relations with others coincided with the Naturalist movement leading playwrights to explore new, implicative modes of conveying what characters cannot or will not declare openly. Pinter's plays, though no longer naturalistic, epitomize this subtextual mode of communication. In the first half of my dissertation I draw on semiotics, the study of how we create meaning. In *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Elam outlines the dramatic codes on which I base my analysis of how playwrights create unexpressed meaning in their plays. Focusing primarily on Pinter, I outline and illustrate a theory of subtext. In the second half, I examine how various playwrights combine these codes to create subtext, "an implied rather than explicitly stated meaning or set of meanings in a literary work arising from unexpressed conflicts underlying the superficial conflicts

and action." I trace the historical development of and audience response to subtextual technique in plays ranging from Ibsen and Chekhov through Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard, discovering that the impulse away from the artificiality of "realism" toward a more "realistic" rendering of human experience has ironically led subtextual playwrights back to artificiality.

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INTRODUCTION

> Henry. I don't know how to write love. I try to write it properly, and it just comes out embarrassing. It's either childish or it's rude. And the rude bits are absolutely juvenile. I can't use any of it. . . . Perhaps I should write it completely artificial. Blank verse. Poetic imagery. Not so much of the 'Will you still love me when my tits are droopy?' 'Of course I will, darling, it's your bum I'm mad for', and more of the 'By my troth, thy beauty makest the moon hide her radiance', do you think?
>
> Annie. Not really, no. . . . You'll have to learn to do sub-text. My Strindberg [*Miss Julie*] is steaming with lust, but there is nothing rude on the page. We just talk round it.
>
> (Stoppard, *The Real Thing* 40)

The term subtext has gained wide currency in the thirty years or so, appearing in such disparate works as Stoppard's play *The Real Thing*, Margaret Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* and Terry Eagleton's discussion of psychoanalytic theory in his *Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Eagleton uses it to identify meaning an author unintentionally gives his work, such as the Oedipal undercurrents of D. H. Lawrence's *Son's and Lovers* (174-79). Subtext in a novel can be intentional as well: Anita Brookner's novels display a subtext very similar to that we find in Pinter's plays. Yet, despite this appearance in fiction and its criticism, subtext is generally associated with plays and dramatic criticism. Any of the dictionaries or glossaries of literary terms which provide it with an entry define it with specific reference to drama. Some people associate subtext with Stanislavsky's acting technique known as

"the system" which an actor uses to convey a sense of his character's unspoken thoughts, feelings, tensions or motivations. In fact, Stanislavsky developed this dramatic practice to accommodate a new kind of drama, Chekhov's in particular (Jones 75-77). In the interests of naturalistic representation, playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov abandoned many of the artificial stage conventions such as asides and soliloquies traditionally used to relay to the audience information unknown to the other characters. Faced with a new technical difficulty of rendering unspoken thoughts, feelings and motivations naturalistically, these playwrights began to experiment with indirect means. They began to direct their characters to "talk around" these undeclared issues, to exploit actors' gestures, movements and positioning as well as props, costume and scenery in order to convey indirectly what was once explicitly declared in dialogue, asides and soliloquies. These new practices constitute what semioticians refer to as under-coding. Playwrights abandoned the traditional, over-coded conventions with which audiences were so familiar, re-encoding information in new unfamiliar ways which confused them. From this re-encoding emerges an awareness of something almost intangible, yet pervasive, lying just beneath the words and actions of the text, that something to which we now refer as subtext.

"Anyone connected with the theater at some time is going to have to confront the concept of the 'subtext'" (Johnston 51). This is because subtext is more than simply an acting philosophy. Many of the foremost playwrights of the modern era write subtext into their plays: Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Beckett, Pinter and

Stoppard; O'Neill, Albee, Shepard and Mamet. In mounting a production of these playwrights' works, everyone from set designer to actor to director must consider the subtext. Spectators of these performances, whether they are consciously aware of it or not, must absorb and process the subtextual elements in order to understand the play. If the performance fails to render the subtext, the play will lack substance, vitality. If the spectator fails to recognize and decode the subtext, she/he will leave the theatre feeling bewildered and perhaps disappointed.

Because the term subtext was coined relatively recently, at the turn of the century,[1] we might be tempted to believe that subtext itself is an exclusively modern phenomenon. However, subtext appears sporadically in a limited form at least as far back as Shakespeare. In *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal and Falstaff perform a mock interview between the Prince, played by Falstaff, and his father, Henry IV, played by Prince Hal. The fictional father berates his son's carousing and commands him to renounce his friendship with the old rogue:

> Falstaff. Whom means your Grace?
>
> Prince. That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Sathan. . . .
>
> Falstaff. No, my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins, but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company - banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.
>
> Prince. I do, I will.
>
> (II.iv.461-481)

In the last line, Prince Hal speaks not only as his father, but also as himself. Shakespeare has him declare his intention - to distance himself from his friends once he assumes the throne - indirectly, subtextually. The other characters are unaware of his intentions, though some modern productions at least might direct Falstaff to betray some fearful recognition of the prince's intent. The audience, on the other hand, is fully cognisant of Prince Hal's plans, having been informed of them in an earlier soliloquy:

> Prince. I know you all, and will a while uphold
> The unyok'd humor of your idleness, . . .
> So when this loose behavior I throw off
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word I am,
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes,
> And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
> My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
> Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
> (I.ii.195-215)

Informing audiences of the characters' motivations, intentions, thoughts and emotions using soliloquies, asides and confidants is standard practice before the modern era.

An important distinction between traditional and modern subtextual practice emerges from this analysis, that between a limited, momentary subtext and a pervasive, sustained subtext. Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of action, pragmata and praxis. The former refers to a play's individual events, the latter to its over-arching action (Walley 22). These terms could be used to describe the two forms of subtext. The example taken from Shakespeare demonstrates pragmata subtext which occurs sporadically in a given text. The playwright carefully lays the

groundwork for these subtextual moments, informing the audience of the characters' true feelings and intentions. In modern subtextual plays, the absence of soliloquies, asides and explicit confidences combines with an intense concentration of pragmata subtext (subtextual exchanges, incidents etc) to create the sustained, pervasive quality of an over-arching or praxis subtext. Simple pragmata subtext can be found in plays of any era; praxis subtext is exclusive to the modern era. Yet despite its prevalence in modern plays, little has been written about subtext. Early critics were puzzled by the new style of playwriting, but had not yet developed a vocabulary with which to identify and analyze it. One critic notes Ibsen's innovative characterization and another the importance of every word and gesture to the understanding of the play (*Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* 168, 219). For a brief time there was some critical interest in the *théâtre du silence* or the *théâtre de l'inexprimé*. This interest centred particularly on a group of French playwrights in the 1920's: Denys Amiel, Charles Vildrac and most notably Jean-Jacques Bernard. Bernard defined the unexpressed as:

> C'est toute la série des pensées ou des désirs qui échappent aux mots, qui ne peuvent s'échanger que par allusion indirect, voire par le regard ou l'attitude, c'est toute la gamme des sentiments inexprimés, inavoués ou inconscients. (quoted in Branford 21)

A number of critics refer to this growing phenomenon of the unexpressed, the unspoken. Yeats and Raymond Williams criticize its imprecision, declaring a preference for traditional declamatory, poetic drama (Jones 77, Williams 21-28). Una Ellis-Fermour sees Bernard's plays as demonstrating one of two "interesting," but ultimately "sterile" attempts "to overcome one of the most serious technical

limitations of the dramatic form," that of the "problem of the intractable matter that will not be spoken and yet must be conveyed" (126, 117). Even as she observes that the attempt "to solve the technical problem of revealing unspoken thought by making the fact of its suppression the main theme of the play . . . calls for a rare and subtle skill to keep us continually aware of its presence" (117), she implies a concern that a playwright can only solve the technical problem by making it the very substance of the play itself, which is perhaps true of Bernard's plays. Certainly, the inability to communicate effectively, whether because of societal constraints as in *Hedda Gabler* or of a simple inability to understand each other's views as in *The Cherry Orchard*, is an important theme in these naturalistic subtextual plays, but it need not overwhelm the other themes. Ellis-Fermour identifies a second approach to this technical difficulty in Pirandello's focus on "the elusiveness of truth and the evasiveness of the hidden, unspoken element in thought" (117). Interestingly, the absurdist drama of Beckett and Pinter, in particular, combines these two approaches of concealing "beneath the surface of behaviour the inner experience and vital preoccupations of the mind" and the "tendency to mistrust the adequacy of human judgement in estimating evidence, whether of fact or of motive" (117). What Ellis-Fermour regards as two sterile approaches to the unspoken merge and evolve into a revitalized subtextual drama.

The term subtext itself gained popularity just as this revitalized drama emerged in the late 1950's, particularly in reference to Pinter's plays. Durbach notes the proliferation of the term in Pinter criticism, claiming it "crops up at least twice in

most papers on the dramatist" (23). In "Dialogue in Pinter and Others" and *Theatre Language*, John Russell Brown is the first to make explicit the connection between the naturalistic theatre of the unexpressed (citing Chekhov and Bernard), Stanislavsky's practical subtext and the confusing subtext of the absurdist drama. Examining Pinter's dialogue, Brown attempts a brief but ultimately unsatisfying analysis of his subtext. For despite his references to the earlier playwrights and his summary of Stanislavsky's technique, Brown neither provides an adequate definition and description of subtext nor adopts a sufficiently comprehensive approach for his examination, something no one has yet accomplished, despite the widespread use of the term.

Stanislavsky appears to be the first to use the term subtext:

> [Subtext] is the manifest, the inwardly felt expression of a human being in a part, which flows uninterruptedly beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existing. The subtext is a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from "magic ifs,' given circumstances, all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. It is the subtext that makes us say the words we do in a play. (*Building a Character* 108)

Naturally, as an actor and a director, Stanislavsky's focus is on the performance of subtext, on the practical applications of creating a role, a character. He believes "the words come from the author, the subtext from the actor" (*Building a Character* 109). Certainly, we rely on the actor to bring subtext to life on the stage, but we are equally aware of subtext even while merely reading a play. Working with Chekhov's

scripts, Stanislavsky realized that the former "intentionally *concealed* the feelings of the characters in the words they were saying and that the silences and pauses were often of much greater importance for the expression of the characters' inner lives than any of their speeches" (Komisarjevsky in Jones 75).[2] This suggests that the author must first write subtext into the play in order for the actor to give inner life to the character and thereby inner life to the play (Jones 76). Thus, dramatic and literary critics over the years have adopted the term subtext to refer to something more than what Stanislavsky meant.

Just what subtext does refer to is not so easily discovered, however. Though actors and directors producing Chekhov since Stanislavsky's time and even audiences attending performances of his plays in England appear to have been aware of the existence of subtext by the mid-1920's (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 25), the term itself does not appear in literary dictionaries, glossaries or guides until fairly recently. Two recent editions have included definitions:

> Theatrical Jargon for the unspoken in a play, what is implied by the pause and by the silence. Perhaps also what Harold Pinter means by the 'pressure behind the words.'
>
> J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1979

> Any meaning or set of meanings which is implied rather than explicitly stated in a literary work, especially in a play. Modern plays such as those of Harold Pinter, in which the meaning of the action is sometimes suggested more by silences and pauses than by dialogue alone, are often discussed in terms of their hidden subtexts.
>
> *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990

It is no coincidence that these entries refer us to Pinter. More than any other playwright, Pinter focuses attention on the unexplicit, the unspoken, the understood. He himself acknowledges the prominence of the unexpressed in his plays:

> Language . . . is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said. ("Writing for the Theatre" 13-14)

This inexplicitness tends to lead critics and spectators to a rather fruitless speculation concerning the characters' motivations, backgrounds, thoughts and feelings. It is not surprising, therefore, that some might regard subtextual analysis as a relatively pointless psychoanalytic endeavour in the Bradlian tradition of imagining the characters' lives beyond the confines of the play itself (Johnston 53-54). Certainly, the growing interest in psychology at the end of the last century contributed to the development of subtext as playwrights interested in naturalistic representation recognized that we do not always openly express or even consciously realize all of our thoughts, feelings and motivations. However, simply deciphering these unexpressed elements will not provide us with a complete understanding of the subtext or the play. These plays do not simply reveal their characters' individual complex

psyches (this is more the domain of expressionism[3]); rather, they examine the complexities of social interaction. Esslin approaches a more precise conception of subtext claiming that,

> It is from the dialectical interplay between the situation as it has developed from the chain of previous situations, on the one hand, and the words that *are* spoken, on the other, that the underlying unspoken thoughts and emotions of the characters - the subtext - ultimately emerge for the attentive and perceptive spectator who has often instinctively mastered the art of decoding such a subtle interplay of signs. (*The Field of Drama* 86)

While he offers a relatively limited Stanislavskian definition of subtext as the characters' underlying thoughts and emotions, Esslin points the way to a more comprehensive conception. The "situation" in drama involves the characters' interrelations and conflicts, and subtext concerns itself with relationships involving power and love. Of course, power and love in all their varying manifestations provide the basis for conflict in all drama, so we might ask what then distinguishes subtextual plays from other dramatic works? Essentially, we find that these plays' meanings are implied not simply because the dialogue is unexplicit, punctuated by pauses and silences, but because the very conflicts at the heart of the action are not explicitly stated. Because these conflicts are rendered indirectly, the characters often appear to mean more than they say, to act incomprehensibly. Moreover, we only gradually become aware of these unexpressed conflicts because the characters appear to engage in other more superficial conflicts. Therefore, I would modify the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*' definition to read:

> An implied rather than explicitly stated meaning or set of meanings in a literary work arising from unexpressed conflicts underlying the superficial conflicts and action.

Once we identify the superficial and underlying conflicts, we begin to grasp the implied meanings of subtextual plays.

How do we identify these superficial and underlying conflicts? Semiotics, the study of how we create meaning, is the most natural approach to discovering how playwrights create and we interpret unexplicit meaning in a play. As Esslin observes,

> This is the most practical, down-to-earth approach to the act of communication that every dramatic performance is intended to establish: by analysing what signs and sign systems, in what interaction, are present and at least potentially operating upon the sensibilities of the recipients of the communication - the audience - we should arrive at the most concrete, factual basis for gaining a clear conception of what actually takes place in an artistic event like a play or film, far less airy-fairy and abstract than analyses of the psychology of characters or philosophical implications. These, the psychologies and philosophies, are always implied and well worth enlarging upon, but, surely only after the basic bedrock of what actually took place on stage or screen has been established. (*The Field of Drama* 49)

This is even more imperative when considering something as indirect and seemingly insubstantial as subtext. We must establish how the elements of drama - the words, gestures, movements, props, set - function and interact, in order to understand the subtext. Regarding these elements as signs which are encoded in a text and rendered onstage provides the basis for a comprehensive analysis leading to that understanding.

Eco, Elam and Esslin emphasize the importance of recognizing that everything onstage - person, object, event - is a sign which represents or refers us back to a person, object or event (or class of these) in the real world. Theatrical performance simultaneously presents a multitude of signs. In analysing subtext, we presume an ideal spectator, fluent in the appropriate cultural and literary conventions, who would recognize and interpret these signs during the course of the play. Naturally, spectators cannot possibly decode every sign, but they should recognize and interpret a sufficient number in order to appreciate the subtext. Some of these signs are prescribed by the playwright in the text, from the words spoken to all of the stage directions determining tone, gesture, set design etc. Elam designates these as dramatic codes. Those which are determined by the actor, director, stage designer and any other influence on the actual physical performance, including the venue itself, Elam groups under the heading of theatrical codes. Subtext can be seen in terms of each of these codes. The innovations Chekhov and the other playwrights write into their texts are dramatic codes. The innovations such as those Stanislavsky introduced to the stage are theatrical codes. Dramatic coding provides the textual subtext which theatrical coding then renders (or sometimes transforms) onstage. Both codes would provide a rich source for subtextual analysis. This study will focus on the dramatic codes, those which the playwright designates in his text.

Esslin identifies three types of signs: the icon, the index and the symbol. The icon "represents what it signifies by a direct image of that object. . . . All dramatic performance is basically iconic: every moment of dramatic action is a direct visual

and aural sign of a fictional or otherwise reproduced reality" (*The Field of Drama* 43). Even the most bizarre of absurdist plays depicts some element of reality. All subtextual plays reproduce reality in varying degrees for varying purposes. The naturalistic plays aim to illuminate reality by rendering it as accurately as possible. The absurdist plays establish a degree of reality only to subvert it in order to illuminate a psychological reality and to encourage us to reassess our perceptions. Index or deictic signs point to something. This could be as simple as an actor physically pointing to another character or an object, or as abstract as a character's speech rhythms deictically drawing attention to his otherwise unarticulated distress. Playwrights use a variety of deictic signs to guide the audience to the subtext it might otherwise, or perhaps in any case, miss. The last signs, the symbols, "have, unlike index signs and iconic signs, no immediate recognisable organic relationship to their 'signifieds.' . . . The meaning of symbolic signs derives entirely from convention . . . Only those individuals who subscribe to this convention or agreement . . . will be able to understand the meaning of this arbitrary" sign (*Field of Drama* 44). In drama, playwrights use symbolic signs in gestures, costume etc either which are established, and therefore easily recognizable, or which acquire their own meanings during the course of, and which remain unique to, a particular play. Subtextual playwrights use both of these symbolic signs, sometimes using the first to summon certain expectations in the spectators only to encourage them to reinterpret these in a new way. So we find that while the types of signs - icon, index, symbol - remain constant, the playwrights' encoding of them changes.

Conventional coding of these signs leads to what semioticians refer to as over-coding in which audiences readily recognize and interpret it correctly. For instance, convention has accustomed the audience to accept that other characters cannot hear an aside even though they may stand within a few feet of the speaker. When playwrights introduce a new subtextual practice to the stage, such as indirect dialogue or parodic discrepancy between words and action, this under-coding may temporarily confuse an audience until after repeated exposure, either to the practice within a performance, or to subsequent plays by the same author, or to numerous plays in a similar style over a period of time, it readjusts its expectations and interpretive skills.

Dramatic under-coding often leads to a disconcerting uneasiness, tension or frustration which psychologists label *psychological dissonance*:

> If an individual expects a certain event to occur and it does not, he will experience dissonance since his cognition that he expects the event to occur is inconsistent with his knowledge that the event did not occur. Because dissonance is presumably an unpleasant psychological state, disconfirmations should result in negative effect and, therefore, be avoided when possible; or, if disconfirmations do occur, should lead to a cognitive restructuring on the part of the person so as to maximize consonant elements. (Watts 469)

Spectators who experience psychological dissonance "attempt to restore a state of psychological consistency or equilibrium" (Smith 6), a *cognitive restructuring* in one of three ways. First, they can suppress the incongruity by simply forgetting about the play after it is over. This demands the least effort and is unlikely to lead to further dissonance. Second, they may deny the incongruity by leaving a performance early, by dismissing it as impossibly obscure, or by distorting it in order to effect a false

reconciliation. While this requires cognitive work, it may only achieve a reformulated dissonance. Finally, the spectators may engage in an active restructuring, "increasing the complexity and depth of [their] information, perceptions, and opinions" (Smith 7). Many may resist this process as it involves much effort with little guarantee that the dissonance will be alleviated:

> Seeking new consonant cognitions ... may easily result in introducing new dissonance, and it requires a good deal of thinking, reading, and talking. Making new connections, seeing new complexities, etc., all involve work ... and, again, the making of such new connections may introduce further dissonance. (Hardyck and Kardush 686)

In terms of subtext, which we have determined is characterized by a layering of conflicts, psychological dissonance becomes a third level of conflict located within the spectator who is already struggling to identify and define the underlying conflict and reconcile it with the superficial conflict. Psychological dissonance commonly characterized audience reactions, recorded by contemporary reviewers, to those plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard examined in this study, and prompted all three methods of cognitive restructuring. Eventually, however, this restructuring leads to acceptance and assimilation of the once unfamiliar dramatic coding.

Dramatic coding encompasses a rather dauntingly large field of study. We can begin by dividing it into three broad sub-codes: linguistic, systemic and aesthetic codes.[4] The linguistic codes include the elements of verbal expression which can be further divided into three sub-codes: pragmatic codes include the principles of

conversation by which we communicate verbally; syntactic and semantic codes encompass the rhetorical strategies with which playwrights arrange words and convey meaning; and the paralinguistic codes involve all of those vocal features which accompany verbal expression such as tone, laughter, stress etc. Systemic codes refer to all of the physical elements of the production specified in the text. These too can be divided into five sub-codes: kinesic codes involve all of the characters' facial expressions and gestures; proxemic codes refer to the characters' spatial interrelationships; scenic codes encompass the set design and the props; costumic codes include make-up and coiffures as well as costumes; and last of all, musical codes include songs or snatches of songs sung by characters in addition to off-stage background music. Finally, playwrights use aesthetic codes to shape their plays and their spectators' reactions to them. They use structural codes to arrange the dramatic events, ethical codes to delineate character and generic codes to guide our response to these actions and characters. Traditionally, these codes were used to create overt, declared meaning. This study will examine how certain playwrights modify these codes in order to create the indirect, unexpressed meaning we refer to as subtext.

Separating the text into these codes is much like separating the slender strands of embroidery floss which twist into one thicker strand. Once we have analyzed the separate subtextual strands of the dramatic codes, we can appreciate the manner in which they twist themselves into a single strand of performance. The first section of this study separates the codes, defining, analysing and illustrating them using excerpts mainly from Pinter's plays. The second section, while identifying individual strands,

examines how from the twisting of these strands emerges an awareness of that something almost intangible, yet pervasive to which we now refer as subtext. The second section also traces the evolution of subtext from its first appearances in realistic and naturalistic drama through is absurdist manifestation to its present incarnation. Many more playwrights have experimented with subtext than I include here; I have selected those representing important developments in what emerges as a continuing process of renewal.

DRAMATIC CODING

Linguistic Codes

> Many treatments of language, particularly discussions of semantics and logic, tend to emphasize the ideational function of language: language as the symbolic representation of an external reality. It has been suggested that the expression of the relationship of things, naming and defining them, is the primary function of language, so that, in popular thought at least, language is used to talk about persons and objects, to impart information, to communicate information, etc. That language may be doing other things at the same time is often ignored. We know, for instance, that language is often used not to talk about objects or ideas 'out there' but rather to convey information about the relationship existing between the two people conversing . . . (*Language and Situation* 48)

Dramatists have always been as conscious of the importance of how things are said as they are of what is said. Traditionally, however, playwrights have focused on rendering ideas and emotions as precisely as possible.[5] This not only kept the audience informed of all the characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations, verbal precision conferred dramatic power. In eighteenth-century comic intrigue or Shavian comic debate, for instance, a character's success depends largely upon her/his verbal dexterity. Modern playwrights, on the other hand, begin to look at how we communicate in ways other than precise articulation. And in that less perfect

articulation, the characters communicate more than what they say; a subtext arises in this very inexactness. The playwright encodes information in the way something is said or not said, in the tone and in the pauses. As spectators we too must adjust our approach to decoding this information, increasing our sensitivity to unconventional coding. The changes in the pragmatic codes, the paralinguistic codes and the semantic and syntactic codes initially resulted in a bewildering under-coding for the audience. But once more attention is given to how something is said, the subtext becomes easier to decode.

Pragmatic Codes

Pragmatic coding involves "the conventions relating to the interpretation of the interpersonal communication" (Elam 58) or, more simply, the principles of conversation. H. P. Grice, in his article "Logic and Conversation," and Kier Elam, in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, explore how unarticulated meaning is nevertheless expressed in ordinary conversation. Grice observes that in everyday speech there are implicit guidelines and goals in any conversation that permit communication:

> Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose

> or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. (45)

Grice pinpoints this general principle for successful communication, labelling it the *cooperative principle*:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (45)

Whether we realize it or not, we generally adhere to this co-operative principle and to a group of maxims which guide our participation.

> 1. The maxims of *quantity*. (a) The contribution should be as informative as is required for the purposes of the exchange. (b) The contribution should not be more informative than is required.
>
> 2. The maxims of *quality*, expressible as the supermaxim 'Try to make the contribution one that is true'. (a) The speaker should not say what he knows to be false. (b) He should not say that for which he lacks evidence. . . .
>
> 3. The maxim of *relation*, i.e. 'Be relevant'.
>
> 4. The maxims of *manner*, expressible as a supermaxim, 'Be perspicuous'. (a) The speaker should avoid obscurity. (b) He should avoid ambiguity. (c) He should avoid unnecessary prolixity. (d) He should be orderly. (Elam 171-72)

Grice examines how we transgress these rules to a limited degree in everyday conversations, thus communicating unspoken meaning while still engaging in a cooperative exchange. For naturally, we do not always adhere to these strictures, and

during these lapses we, intentionally or otherwise, communicate indirectly. Elam suggests transferring the analysis of these transgressed principles to dramatic exchanges. Typically, dramatic dialogue adheres to the conversational rules to an even greater degree than everyday speech because of its traditional declarative nature. Subtextual playwrights increasingly challenge this convention. Pinter's dialogue in particular dispenses with much of the conventional descriptive, informational and interpretive functions of declarative drama. His characters not only transgress, they deliberately exploit these maxims of conversation, and in doing so they implicate unspoken meaning; they communicate with each other subtextually. In this respect, Pinter's plays reflect reality more accurately than realistic drama. Once we shift from expecting (for the most part) clearly articulated cooperative exchanges to analysing how the characters transgress and exploit these conversational rules, we discover one way in which they communicate subtextually with each other and the playwright with us.

Some critics claim that Pinter's plays demonstrate the theme of "a failure to communicate," a label to which Pinter justifiably objects.[6] This phrase suggests an unintentional breakdown between the characters. Pinter's characters, on the contrary, either deliberately avoid communicating or they do so indirectly; it is rather the audience who sometimes fails to catch the meaning of the exchanges. "Failure to communicate" more appropriately describes the interaction of Chekhov's characters as we shall see later.

In the meantime, if we look at Ionesco who tests the very limits of communication, often surpassing them, we discover that his characters consistently break the conversational maxims, contributing to the complete breakdown of communication in his plays. Elam cites three examples of maxim-breaking found in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (Elam 175-76). Mrs. Smith breaks the maxim of quantity by providing this unnecessary information:

> Mrs. Smith. There, it's nine o'clock. We've drunk the soup, and eaten the fish and chips, and the English salad. The children have drunk English water. We've eaten well this evening. That's because we live in the suburbs of London and because our name is Smith. (9)

The maxim of quality is broken by the fire chief: "I should like to remove my helmet, but I haven't time to sit down. (He sits down, without removing his helmet)" (27). Mrs. Smith and Mr. Martin violate the maxim of relevance:

> Mr. Martin. One doesn't polish spectacles with black wax. Mrs. Smith. Yes, but with money one can buy anything.
> Mr. Martin. I'd rather kill a rabbit than sing in a garden. (39)

The Professor in *The Lesson* disregards each of the maxims of manner indulging in ambiguity, obscurity, prolixity and disorderliness:

> Professor. That which distinguishes the neo-Spanish languages from each other and their idioms from the other linguistic groups, such as the group of languages called Austrian and neo-Austrian or Hapsburgian, as well as the Esperanto, Helvetian, Monacan, Swiss, Andorran, Basque, and jai ali groups, and also the groups of diplomatic and technical languages -- that which distinguishes them, I repeat, is their striking resemblance which

> makes it so hard to distinguish them from each other -- I'm speaking of the neo-Spanish languages which one is able to distinguish from each other, however, only thanks to their distinctive characteristics, absolutely indisputable proofs of their extra-ordinary resemblance, which renders indisputable their common origin, and which, at the same time, differentiates them profoundly -- through the continuation of the distinctive traits which I've just cited. (61)

Ionesco's mangling of the maxims is obviously an extreme experiment highlighting how communication functions (Revzina and Revzin 245). Pinter's transgressions are more subtle, bending rather than breaking the maxims, enabling the characters to communicate subtextually with each other and with the audience. An audience accustomed to more conventional dialogue may not initially recognize the new coding. As Elam notes, we expect characters to

> produce utterances which are informative (indeed this constraint is, perhaps, stronger than in the case of 'everyday' talk), 'true' with respect to the dramatic world (unless strategically insincere), comprehensible and relevant to the occasion. On such expectations the audience bases -and supposes the dramatic listener to base - the 'reading between the lines' which makes up a considerable part of its decoding. (173)

Pinter disregards these expectations for informative and verifiable exchanges. He substitutes dialogue in which characters seemingly ramble aimlessly; scrupulously avoid the most innocent of questions or subjects; unhesitatingly and even transparently lie or invent fantastic stories; inexplicably veer to apparently unrelated topics; and indulge in maddeningly obscure or comically ambiguous utterances. All of which leave uninitiated spectators who arrive at the theatre expecting informative and

verifiable exchanges feeling perhaps entertained but certainly confused. They have yet to learn to decode the conversational implicatures that abound in any Pinter play.

If our uninitiated spectators continue to attend Pinter's plays they will become familiar with two typical characters: the garrulous talker and the reticent listener. Each plays havoc with the first of these maxims, that of quantity. The first may transgress both the over-informative and the under-informative rules. For instance, Stanley in *The Birthday Party* unintentionally reveals more to McCann than he intends:

> McCann. Do you find [the seaside] bracing?
> Stanley. Me? No. But you will. (*He sits at the table*). I like it here, but I'll be moving soon. Back home. I'll stay there too, this time. No place like home. (*He laughs*.) I wouldn't have left, but business calls. Business called, and I had to leave for a bit. You know how it is.
> McCann (*sitting at the table, left*). You in business?
> Stanley. No. I think I'll give it up. I've got a small private income, you see. I think I'll give it up. Don't like being away from home. I used to live very quietly -- played records, that's about all. Everything delivered to the door. Then I started a little private business, in a small way, and it compelled me to come down here -- kept me longer than I expected. . . . I lived so quietly. You can only appreciate what you've had when things change. (49-50)

Stanley's reply to McCann's superficially innocuous question is both effusive and evasive. Because all of the information about his business, about going home, about how quietly he lives is unsolicited, we sense that Stanley is engaging in something more than small talk. He is attempting to communicate a reassurance to the stranger that he will quietly give up whatever "private business" he is engaged in at the

boarding house to return home, wherever that is. This unsolicited and lengthy response to a simple question functions deictically, drawing our attention to Stanley's nervousness, even fear. Moreover, he avoids explaining the nature of his business when prompted by McCann, sticking to non-specifics such as "private" and "a small way." Pinter's use of reticence here casts suspicion on Stanley and on his activities while betraying the latter's fear of the stranger.

Very often Pinter brings together one of each of his two typical characters. Both Davies, the garrulous talker, and Aston, the reticent listener, communicate subtextually in the following scene from *The Caretaker*:

> Davies. When he come at me tonight I told him. Didn't I? You heard me tell him, didn't you?
> Aston. I saw him have a go at you.
> Davies. Go at me? You wouldn't grumble. The filthy skate, an old man like me, I've had dinner with the best.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Aston. Yes, I saw him have a go at you.
> Davies. All of them toe-rags, mate, got the manners of pigs. I might have been on the road a few years but you can take it from me I'm clean. I keep myself up. That's why I left my wife. Fortnight after I married her, no, not so much as that, no more than a week, I took the lid off a saucepan, you know what was in it? A pile of her underclothing, unwashed. The pan for vegetables, it was. The vegetable pan. That's when I left her and I haven't seen her since. (17-18)

Aston's reluctance to corroborate Davies' version of the scuffle at the caff implies that his view of the incident was different, that he did not see enough of it to form a

judgement, or that he is reluctant or simply too self-absorbed to engage in the conversation Davies desires. We might initially interpret his reluctance to contradict Davies as a sign of politeness. As we become more familiar with Pinterian characters, however, we find that politeness is rarely a guiding principle. Reticence may be used as a weapon, but it is rarely benign. It is more likely to be a provocation either to anger or to revelation. In this case, Aston (wittingly or unwittingly) encourages Davies to reveal a preoccupation with cleanliness, a quality the tramp believes elevates him above the transient, immigrant company with which he usually finds himself associating. The anecdote concerning his wife, while humorous, is superfluous, part of the over-insistence that confirms rather than dismisses our suspicion that Davies is himself a disreputable character. The over-informative transgression manifests itself in over-insistence and in uncontrolled ramblings, the under-informative in evasiveness and embarrassed politeness or calculated provocation, all of which suggest something other than what the character superficially reveals or intends.

The same is true of the quality maxim transgressions. Pinter's characters frequently lie, and their lies usually point to some undeclared motive. McCann tells Stanley that he and Goldberg are on a short holiday (49) not long after he and Goldberg have discussed, onstage, the "job" they have come to do (39). The deliberate deception reinforces the growing sense of threat the two men pose to Stanley. As well as refraining from saying "what he knows to be false," a speaker should refrain from saying "that for which he lacks evidence." One such

unsubstantiated claim appears at the opening of the second act in *The Homecoming* when Max insists,

> Max. I've got the feeling you're a first-rate cook.
> Ruth. I'm not bad.
> Max. No, I've got the feeling you're a number one cook. Am I right, Teddy? (61)

Max bases his "feeling" on the meagre evidence of a single cup of coffee. His persistence suggests an ulterior motive; he would like his newly-discovered daughter-in-law to replace his deceased wife, Jessie, as house-keeper and cook (the sexual issues have yet to be broached). In Pinter's dramatic world, lies and unsubstantiated claims invariably camouflage an intention to manipulate or to evade other characters.

In the following exchange from *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg counters Stanley's lies, a transgression of the quality maxim, with an abrupt change in topic, a transgression of the third maxim, that of relevance:

> Stanley (*moving downstage*). I'm afraid there's been a mistake. We're booked out. Your room is taken. Mrs. Boles forgot to tell you. You'll have to find somewhere else.
> Goldberg. Are you the manager here?
> Stanley. That's right.
> Goldberg. Is it a good game?
> Stanley. I run the house. I'm afraid you and your friend will have to find other accommodation.
> Goldberg (*rising*). Oh, I forgot, I must congratulate you on your birthday. (*Offering his hand.*) Congratulations.
> Stanley (*ignoring hand*). Perhaps you're deaf.
> Goldberg. No, what makes you think that? As a matter of fact, every single one of my senses is at its peak. (54)

When challenging Stanley's authority merely provokes a false bravado, Pinter has Goldberg switch tactics; changing the topic not only implies that he doubts Stanley's claim to be in charge, but also sends a clear message that the two intruders will not be leaving. Similarly, Kate, Deely and Anna in *Old Times* send subtextual messages to one another by infringing on the relevance maxim. While Deely doggedly talks about himself and his work, Kate persistently steers the conversation to Anna's life in Sicily:

> Deely. I had a great crew in Sicily. A marvellous cameraman. Irving Shultz. Best in the business. We took a pretty austere look at the women in black. The little old women in black. I wrote the film and directed it. My name is Orson Welles.
> Kate (*to* Anna). Do you drink orange juice on your terrace in the morning, and bullshots at sunset, and look down at the sea?
> Anna. Sometimes, yes.
> Deely. As a matter of fact I am at the top of my profession, as a matter of fact, and I have indeed been associated with substantial numbers of articulate and sensitive people, mainly prostitutes of all kinds.
> Kate (*to* Anna). And do you like the Sicilian people?
> Deely. I've been there. There's nothing more to see, there's nothing more to investigate, nothing. There's nothing more in Sicily to investigate.
> Kate (*to* Anna). Do you like the Sicilian people?
>
> Anna *stares at her.*
>
> *Silence.*
>
> Anna (*quietly*). Don't let's go out tonight, don't let's go anywhere, let's stay in. I'll cook something, you can wash your hair, you can relax, we'll put on some records. (38-39)

Deely's outrageous interjections on Orson Welles and articulate, sensitive prostitutes signal his exasperation with being ignored. The exclusiveness of Kate's inquiries, always directed to Anna, implies her impatience with Deely's egotistical ramblings and ridiculous posturing. When Kate repeats a question, she pointedly and symbolically repudiates Deely and his domination of her. Anna's drastic change in topic deictically acknowledges this repudiation. Her reply recreates the scene of their living together before Kate married Deely, thus underlining the latter's exclusion. With this last transgression of the relevance maxim, Anna not only sends the others an encoded message, but Pinter also symbolically signals a radical shift in the relationships between the three, in the subtextual power struggle between Deely and Anna to control Kate.

Pinter directs Mick to transgress the last maxim of manner so that he can control and manipulate Davies in *The Caretaker*. In a number of diatribes intended to unnerve the tramp, Mick is deliberately obscure, prolix and disorderly. These set-pieces often strain the relevance maxim as well, such as when Mick describes his uncle's brother:

> Mick. You remind me of my uncle's brother. He was always on the move, that man. Never without his passport. Had an eye for the girls. Very much your build. Bit of an athlete. Long-jump specialist. He had a habit of demonstrating different run-ups in the drawing-room round about Christmas time. Had a penchant for nuts. That's what it was. Nothing else but a penchant. Couldn't eat enough of them. Peanuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, monkey nuts, wouldn't touch a piece of fruitcake. Had a marvellous stop-watch. Picked it up in Hong Kong. The day after they

> chucked him out of the Salvation Army. Used to go in at number four for Beckenham Reserves. That was before he got his Gold Medal. Had a funny habit of carrying his fiddle on his back. Like a papoose. I think there was a bit of Red Indian in him. To be honest, I've never made out how he came to be my uncle's brother. I've often thought that maybe it was the other way round. I mean that my uncle was his brother and he was my uncle. But I never called him uncle. As a matter of fact I called him Sid. My mother called him Sid too. It was a funny business. Your spitting image he was. Married a Chinaman and went to Jamaica. (40)

This jumble of images seems to make little sense. However, with his insistence on the tramp's resembling someone he knows, Mick draws attention to and implies that Davies' explanation of himself is rather vague at best. Pinter reveals Mick's doubts about Davies' uncertain identity (the tramp goes by two names and is reticent concerning his origins) with references to an uncle's uncertain identity. The passport parallels Davies' "official papers" in Sidcup. The uncle's nomadic existence, the detailed place names, the allusions to different nationalities seem pointed allusions to Davies' own transience, his tendency to name specific spots to which he has allegedly been around the countryside and his prejudiced preoccupation with foreigners. Through Mick's superficial nonsense, Pinter suggests connections with which Mick communicates his distrust to both Davies and the spectator. Davies' irritation when Mick launches into a third "you resemble" tirade indicates he has understood Mick's innuendo.

While Mick is deliberately obscure and disorderly, Pinter also has his characters employ unintentionally ambiguous and revealing remarks which transgress

the manner maxim. Two such comments in *The Homecoming* raise speculation concerning Teddy's mother. The characters themselves remain unaware of the suggestiveness of their remarks. Showing Ruth his childhood home, Teddy tells her,

> Teddy. I mean, it's a fine room, don't you think? Actually there was a wall, across there ... with a door. We knocked it down ... years ago ... to make an open living area. The structure wasn't affected, you see. My mother was dead. (37)

This odd association between Jessie and a supporting structure implies that her death created a profound weakness in the family unit. Max later makes a curious connection between Jessie and Ruth: "I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died" (58). Max unwittingly implies not only that Ruth is a whore, but that Jessie was also. His ambivalence towards his wife recurs throughout the play. One minute he praises her as a good wife and mother, the next he damns her as a slut and a bitch. Through these ambiguous and contradictory remarks, Pinter foreshadows Sam's somehow anti-climactic revelation of Jessie's affair with Max's pal Mac as well as Ruth's stunning final arrangement with Teddy's family. But in addition to foreshadowing, these remarks function as subtextual messages pressuring Ruth to fulfil the various needs and desires of the men in the family. Though the spectator may initially fail to decode these messages, Ruth never misses a beat, gauging her moment to capitalize on these needs and desires, negotiating her position to the best of her advantage.

Semantic and Syntactic Codes

I have grouped the semantic and syntactic subcodes together as they often intertwine in single passages, and as they both draw on rhetorical devices. The rhetorical devices falling into the syntactic realm include such things as anaphora, "the repetition of the first same word[s] in successive phrases, clauses, or sentences;" epiphora, "placing the same word or words at the end of two or more clauses or sentences;" and symploche, "a combination of anaphora and epiphora;" asyndeton and polysyndeton, the accumulation of phrases joined by commas in the first instance and the conjunction "and" in the second; antithesis, "the contrasting of two [often opposite] ideas;" and circumlocution, "the use of many words where a few would do" and only indirectly addressing the subject in question. The semantic rhetorical devices include euphemism, "the disguising of disagreeable, odious, or painful ideas by the use of expressions which do not express such ideas literally;" and antiphrasis, context-dependent "one word irony" used to imply the opposite of what is said; litotes "ironic understatement" which emphasizes through expressing "an affirmative by negating its contrary;" and counter-litotes, ironic overstatement which de-emphasizes; and asteismus, "the 'picking up' of a term . . in order to modify its sense or reference."[7] Other semantic strategies include tenor shifts and diction patterns. These are all traditional features of drama with which the spectator will probably feel familiar. However, this comforting familiarity is to some extent undercut by the modifications subtextual playwrights make in the encoding of these elements. For

they increasingly enlist these devices in order to suggest underlying issues, conflicts, emotions and motivations rather than to clarify or to declaim them.

Because Kier Elam sees playwrights as having re-encoded rhetorical figures, he feels that critics need to reassess the manner in which they analyze these figures in both older and modern plays alike. He notes that,

> In the past, rhetorical analysis of plays has been principally devoted to the study of imagery, tropes and schemes - that is, it has been limited to a largely *literary* approach concerned with those semantic and syntactic patterns which, typically, characterize poetic discourse in general. But while tropes and schemes unquestionably abound in much drama, it is arguable that dramatic rhetoric is carried less by imagery patterns than by figurative *acts* defined as such within the speaking situation and involving the speaker, the addressee and their 'world' directly. (*The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* 177)

He cites an exchange between Richard III and Anne of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *Richard III* as an example of antithesis, "which in poetry often has the effect of creating a logical or conceptual balance, but in the drama typically, carries the conflicting propositional, illocutionary and ethical commitments of the speakers" and asteismus, "the 'picking up' of a term in the linguistic co-text in order to modify its sense or reference" (177-78):

> Gloucester. Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me
> have Some patient leisure to excuse myself.
>
> Anne. Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make
> No excuse current, but to hang thyself.

Gloucester. By such despair I should accuse myself.

Anne. And by despairing shalt thou stand excused
(I.ii.81-86)

Whereas the conflict between Richard III and Anne is openly expressed here, in subtextual plays, the rhetorical figures embody or indicate an unexpressed conflict, emotion or intention.

In Pinter's plays, for instance, the syntactic patterns and their resulting rhythms convey a sense of a character's state of mind. In *The Birthday Party*, McCann's anxiety the morning after the party is clearly suggested in this passage:

McCann. Let's finish and go. Let's get it over and go.
Get the thing done. Let's finish the bloody thing.
Let's get the thing done and go! (86)

This speech has twenty-six words, yet there are really only eleven individual words repeated over and over in variation using anaphora (repetition of the beginning word[s]), epistrophe (repetition of the concluding word[s]) and symploce (which combines the former two, repeating both the beginning and concluding word[s]). "Let's finish" and "Let's go" each begin sentences twice. "And go" appears three times at the end. Three sentences begin with "Let's" and end with "and go." Any of these three devices alone would provide intensity and emphasis; together they create a sense of overwhelming urgency and agitation. The night of interrogation has exacted its toll, leaving McCann edgy and restless to leave the scene. The tension kindles an apprehension in the audience as we begin to suspect that Goldberg and McCann have seriously and irreparably harmed Stanley.

Pinter conveys acute distress again through the use of rhetorical devices and their resulting rhythms when Deely, in *Old Times*, feels threatened by Anna. Using antithesis, he emphasizes the separation between Anna and her husband and betrays his own fear of being left alone:

> Deely. Yes, but you're here, with us. He's there, alone, lurching up and down the terrace, waiting for a speedboat, waiting for a speedboat to spill out beautiful people, at least. Beautiful Mediterranean people. Waiting for all *that*, a kind of elegance we know nothing about, a slim-bellied Cote d'Azure thing we know absolutely nothing about, a lobster and lobster sauce ideology we know fuck all about . . . (63)

Deely's opening antithesis contrasting here/there and with us/alone introduces his preoccupation with abandonment. The two long sentences are examples of asyndeton (an accumulation of phrases joined by commas) which lends an intensity and an immediacy to the images he conjures. Anaphora betrays a sense of Deely's mounting agitation as he repeats "waiting for a speedboat," once with the variation "waiting for all *that*." In the second long sentence, epistrophe further increases the intensity of Deely's desperation as he repeats "we know nothing about" with the elaborations "absolutely nothing" and "fuck all." "Beautiful people" from the end of the first long sentence is repeated and varied in the short phrase that follows. Framing this phrase between the two long, complex sentences, Pinter focuses our attention on the heart of Deely's fear: beautiful Mediterranean people like Anna and her husband may lure Kate away to their exotic life, leaving him alone.

Deely's fear is not unwarranted. In addition to indicating emotional states, Pinter uses syntax to convey a character's intentions. He reveals Anna's intentions indirectly, beginning with her opening monologue. Here she begins her unexplicit appeal to Kate, recreating the atmosphere of their younger days in London:

> Anna. ... and the cafés we found, almost private ones, weren't they? where artists and writers and sometimes actors collected, and others with dancers, we sat hardly breathing with our coffee, heads bent, so as not to be seen, so as not to disturb, so as not to distract, and listened and listened to all those words, all those cafés and all those people, creative undoubtedly, and does it all still exist I wonder? do you know? can you tell me? (14)

The entire speech, of which I have only quoted the section following her brief hesitation, is one long sentence. This run-on sentence gives the impression of breathlessness, of excitement and activity, as detail follows hard upon detail. The use of asyndeton (the accumulation of phrases connected with commas), beginning with "we sat" up to "so as not to distract" speeds up our sense of time, lending a feeling of simultaneity which is then slowed down with the use of polysyndeton (the accumulation of phrases joined by conjunctions) in "and listened and listened" thus rendering the impression of much time spent listening. Anaphora provides intensity in the two series of phrases beginning with "so as not to" and "all those." Anna also intersperses inviting questions in a direct attempt to draw Kate into the recreation. All of this is intended to lure Kate back into the relationship the two once shared.

Another example of a character using syntax deliberately to affect another appears in *The Birthday Party*. Goldberg uses circumlocution as well as another

rhetorical device, euphemism, to mollify McCann's uneasiness about the "job" they have been sent to perform:

> Goldberg. The main issue is a singular issue and quite distinct from your previous work. Certain elements, however, might well approximate in points of procedure to some of your other activities. All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. Satisfied? (40)

In circling about without specifying the exact nature of their job, Goldberg appropriates the vague, evasive style of a bureaucrat or politician. We tend to mistrust this kind of unspecific language, signalling as it usually does some attempt to conceal and divert attention. It is also reminiscent of euphemistic diction used in the underworld or secret service, or at least in depictions of these in films: activities, issues, procedure, assignment, mission recall other apparently benign expressions such as "liquidation" and "termination" which avoid direct, concrete reference in favour of depersonalized, distancing rhetoric.

Euphemism is just one of the semantic rhetorical devices playwrights use to suggest more than what is said superficially. Other rhetorical devices function to reveal character, the nature of relationships and the underlying conflicts. Elam identifies Shakespeare's use of antiphrasis (one-word irony) and litotes (ironic understatement to emphasize) in his characterization of Falstaff. Falstaff addresses his page, "Sirrah, you giant" (antiphrasis; *2 Henry IV* I.ii.1) and describes himself as "with a white head and something a round belly" (litotes; *2 Henry IV* I.ii.188-89)

revealing the old rogue's endearing mischievousness. In Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, George and Martha frequently bait one another with sarcastic counter-litotes (ironic overstatement to represent something as less than it is): "He's a God," and "Aren't they something? Aren't these . . . *men* the absolute end?" (26,48). In *The Real Thing*, Henry plays with asteismus ("the 'picking -up' of a term . . . in order to modify its sense or reference" Elam 178) in order to avoid examining his wife's perceptions of love, possession and jealousy, perceptions which eventually contribute to her infidelity:

> Annie. You don't love me the way I love you. I'm just a relief after Charlotte, and a novelty.
> Henry. You're a novelty all right. I never *met* anyone so silly. I love you. I don't know why you're behaving like this.
> Annie. I'm behaving normally. It's you who's abnormal. You don't care enough to *care*. (43)

Henry's witty word-play marks him as an intellectual and an aesthete. His equivocation reveals his desire to avoid confronting any potentially painful emotions. He holds his wife and everyone else at arms' length with his cleverness.

Figurative language also contributes to our awareness of the characters' preoccupations. For instance in Pinter's *The Caretaker*, violence dominates Davies' everyday speech in a series of puns (Brown, *Theatre Language* 44). He unconsciously uses such words and phrases as "knocked off," "give me the bullet," "knocking about," "dead out," and "flog" in connection with such ordinary occurrences as "Some bloke tried to flog me some suede [shoes] the other day" (24). In *The Homecoming*, violence combines with sex and physical corruption to dominate

the imagistic patterns. Lenny wrestles with a mangle and intends to stifle his clock. Max, a butcher, angrily hopes his son will drown in his own blood. The men, especially Max, refer to each other as bitches and sluts and to Ruth as a tart and a scrubber. Sex is referred to as going the whole hog. Everyone and everything is filthy, stinking, diseased. Images of rotting and corruption - maggots, pus, crap - proliferate. The household is not simply the urinal Teddy claims, it is a cesspool of degenerating sexual frustrations. This language prepares us for the shocking resolution. The language in *Old Times* is generally more deliberate and more subtle. Anna annoys Deely with such sexually suggestive words as "gaze" and "beguile." He is, at times, blunt and clumsy, choosing such transparent adjectives as "luscious," "voluptuous" and "thigh-kissing." On other occasions, his approach is more subtle, simulating and even appropriating her language such as "sensuous" and "gaze." Charging the play with sexual undertones, this suggestive language not only nurtures suspicions that Anna and Kate were once lovers, it also focuses our attention on the struggle for sexual control over Kate. Through this recurring imagery Pinter guides us to the central preoccupations of his characters.

While imagistic patterns involve the recurrence of certain kinds of words, tenor shifts involve the characters' choice of language in a particular exchange and are often suggestive of their character and intentions. In *Language and Situation*, Michael Gregory and Suzanne Carroll examine how language in an exchange is dictated by the kind of relationship two people share:

> To come to terms with how roles and relationships are realized in language, we speak of tenors of discourse.

> Tenor reflects how the addresser (the speaker or the writer) interacts with the addressee (the listener or the reader) in an addressee relationship. (49-50)

Pinter's characters frequently shift tenors as a tactical manoeuvre. We saw earlier how Stanley in *The Birthday Party* adopts the posture of authority in informing the two strangers that the rooming house is full. This clumsy defensive gesture contrasts with Mick's disconcerting attack on Davies in *The Caretaker*. He switches from a friendly, patronizing figure encouraging Davies to help "fix up" the house, to an exacting employer accusing the tramp of deliberately misleading him:

> Mick. You mean you wouldn't know how to fit teal-blue, copper and parchment linoleum squares and have those colours re-echoed in the walls?
> Davies. Now, look here, where'd you get--?
> Mick. You wouldn't be able to decorate out a table in afromosia teak veneer, an armchair in oatmeal tweed and a beech frame settee with a woven sea-grass seat? (81)

The sophistication of Mick's language is intended to intimidate Davies, but it also signals an abrupt change in their relationship. Suddenly the cosy friendship Davies thought he was building with Mick and the security this potentially ensured dissolves in a bewildering flood of decorator's jargon.

Paralinguistic Codes

Another linguistic subcode consists of the paralinguistic features attendant on an utterance. These include such vocal features as hesitations, pauses and silences, tone and stress, tempo, loudness, pitch and rhythm. Elam notes that

> the paralinguistic handling by the speaker of his own utterances assists the listener in following and absorbing his discourse by marking syntactic, illocutionary or propositional units, regulating the flow of semantic information, varying the presentation of content according to the degree and kind of attention required, and so on. (80)

Poyatos divides these vocal features into four categories. Tone, volume, tempo, pitch and stress are *primary qualities*. *Qualifiers* control the quality of the utterance, whether it is delivered in a whispering, murmuring or quavering voice, in a creaky or breathy voice, in a hollow, throaty or guttural voice. *Differentiators* encompass such elements as "laughter, crying, sighing, coughing, yawning, sneezing . . . etc." Finally, utterances such as aha, ahem, humph, gasps, tongue clicks, sniffs and moans are known as *alternants* (Poyatos 86-89). Poyatos omits one last paralinguistic category which includes the hesitations, pauses and silences, punctuating characters' dialogue. Our everyday use of all of these features is not generally arbitrary or personal but learned and, therefore, "strongly rule-bound (codified)" (Elam 80). And where there are rules or codes, there are rule- or code-breakers. If we keep in mind Pfister's notion of complementarity and discrepancy along with Grice's ideas on maxim- or code-breaking, we can examine the relationship between what is said and how it is said with an eye on how variations in this relationship render an exchange subtextual. In this way, playwrights convey indirectly a character's unexpressed emotional state or intentions.

Some playwrights, O'Neill (*Long Day's Journey Into Night*) and Albee (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) spring to mind, indicate such paralinguistic features as tone

and stress in parenthesis or in italics. Punctuation marks such as exclamation points and question marks also serve as a guide for the actor. In Pinter's plays, the tempo, loudness, pitch etc. are written to a large degree into the dialogue itself. For instance, Meg's reaction in the following exchange from *The Birthday Party* suggests that Stanley's tone is inconsistent with simply describing his fried bread:

> Meg. Was it nice?
> Stanley. What?
> Meg. The fried bread.
> Stanley. Succulent.
> Meg. You shouldn't say that word.
> Stanley. What word?
> Meg. That word you said. . . . You shouldn't say that word to a married woman. (27)

Stanley rebels against Meg's incessant, maddening questions, jeering at her inarticulateness (her exclusive use of "nice") with his polysyllabic adjective. His tone may be tauntingly sexually suggestive, or perhaps Meg, unfamiliar with the word and absorbed in her own perverse fantasy world, readily misinterprets a sarcastic or superior tone as sexually insinuating.

In *The Homecoming*, Pinter uses interjection and repetition to place a natural stress on the word "Dad:"

> Lenny. What the boys want, Dad, is your own special brand of cooking, Dad. . . . (33)

The first "Dad," set off with two commas, heightens expectation and emphasizes the ensuing insult. The special brand of cooking alludes to Lenny's earlier condemnation of Max's cooking as dog food. With the repetition of "Dad" at the end of the sentence, Lenny draws jeering attention to his father's unnatural feminine role as

nurturer, implying his inability to accomplish even women's work and undermining his position as the head of the household.

In another passage from *The Homecoming*, we sense the rising tempo, pitch and volume as Max works himself into a frenzy:

> Max. I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab! To keep my family in luxury. Two families! My mother was bedridden, my brothers were all invalids. I had to earn the money for the leading psychiatrists. I had to read books! I had to study the disease, so that I could cope with an emergency at every stage. A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife - don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth - I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs - when I give a little cough my back collapses - and here I've got a lazy idle bugger of a brother won't even get to work on time. . . . (63)

Much of the inherent tempo, pitch and volume in this passage can be attributed to the syntax patterns such as anaphora (repeating the first word or words in several clauses or sentences) and asyndeton (joining phrases with commas). Instructions concerning the paralinguistic features are unnecessary; even simply reading this passage, we sense the building intensity of Max's frustrations that would naturally be expressed in performance with increasing volume, pitch and tempo. Characters such as Max and Deely in *Old Times* (who indulges in similarly frenzied outbursts) contrast to the impenetrable characters who remain controlled even in the most bizarre or threatening of situations. One expects an outburst from Teddy during the negotiation between his family and his wife. Instead, he placidly accepts advice on how to reach London

Airport now that Sam, from whom he was expecting a ride, is incapacitated. It is this cold detachment that prompts some critics to view Teddy as having stage-managed this arrangement from the beginning.

These examples again demonstrate how Pinter indirectly conveys information about his characters' emotional states. How a character says something can also indicate his intentions. For instance, an onslaught of nonsense is devastating simply in its overwhelming rhythms. One critic notes the "remorselessly mounting insistence of the verbal rhythm" in the barrage of absurd questions and ridiculous accusations with which Goldberg and McCann interrogate, oppress and destroy Stanley (Wickham 29). Mick, in *The Caretaker*, uses a mixed catalogue of daunting financial terms and other absurdly unrelated catch phrases:

> Mick. . . . I know an insurance firm in West Ham'll be pleased to handle the deal for you. No strings attached, open and above board, untarnished record; twenty per cent interest, fifty per cent deposit; down payments, back payments, family allowances, bonus schemes, remission of term for good behaviour, six months lease, yearly examination of the relevant archives, tea laid on, disposal of shares, benefit extension, compensation on cessation, comprehensive indemnity against Riot, Civil Commotion, Labour Disturbances, Storm, Tempest, Thunderbolt, Larceny or Cattle all subject to a daily check and double check. (45)

Pinter conveys the menace, the threat Mick poses more in the relentless rhythm itself than in the content of the words.

Traditionally characters have enjoyed a high degree of articulateness, knowing and expressing precisely their thoughts and feelings. However, since the turn of the century and the growing interest in Naturalism, the unconscious, the unarticulated and the inarticulate, many playwrights have attempted to mirror the natural unevenness and interruptions most of us experience while conversing by designating hesitations, pauses and even the longer silences in the text itself. These designations are more than simply mimetic, for no playwright simply transcribes everyday speech; they contribute to the subtext by shaping the dialogue, drawing attention to what is left unspoken and allowing it to rise to the surface.

In "'Punctuation' and Patterning in *The Homecoming*," John Dawick notes how hesitations are often the result of an inarticulate character's groping attempt to find the words that precisely express what he desires to say (38). More importantly, from a subtextual standpoint, hesitations suggest the emotions and/or the motivation underpinning the utterance. For instance, they reveal that Goldberg is lying in *The Birthday Party* as he haltingly reassures Petey on Stanley's condition:

> Goldberg (*a little uncertainly.*) Oh ... a little better, I think, a little better. Of course, I'm not really qualified to say, Mr. Boles. I mean, I haven't got the ... the qualifications. The best thing would be if someone with the proper ... mnn ... qualifications ... was to have a look at him. Someone with a few letters after his name. It makes all the difference. (81)

The hesitations not only give the impression Goldberg is avoiding a specific answer to Petey's questions, but that he is also improvising an explanation for Stanley's removal. Moreover, Goldberg, who up to this point has been unfalteringly eloquent

even when he is lying, suddenly appears nervous and uneasy. His lies and his nervousness intensify our already aroused suspicions concerning the true nature of Stanley's condition and the night-long interrogation. The nervousness betrayed in Goldberg's hesitations suggests that his gruelling session has left Goldberg, as well as McCann, profoundly shaken and disturbed.

While Goldberg falls victim to his anxieties and to hesitations, other characters intentionally use these brief pauses for emphasis. Dawick remarks on the "ironic emphasis" Lenny in *The Homecoming* achieves with a carefully placed hesitation. When Max berates his son for shouting in the middle of the night, Lenny responds, "Look, why don't you just ... pop off, eh?" (51). The pun on "pop" plays on the doubtfulness of Max's paternity. Lenny's cruel insinuations serve to upset Max and to divert the latter's demand for an explanation:

> Lenny. I'll tell you what, Dad, since you're in the mood for a bit of a ... chat, I'll ask you a question. It's a question I've been meaning to ask you for some time. That night ... you know ... the night you got me ... that night with Mum, what was it like? (52)

Just as he emphasizes "pop," he emphasizes "chat," a euphemism for a father and son facts-of-life discussion (Dawick 39). With malicious deliberation, Lenny dwells on the uncertainty surrounding his own conception.

In company with hesitations are the slightly longer pauses. Mention Pinter to someone even casually familiar with his work, and she/he will often respond with some reference to "the pause." The pause has indeed become almost a Pinter trademark. Yet the specific designation of pauses in the text dates back at least to

Chekhov, and the manner in which they function has changed little since that time. Pauses draw attention to what is left unsaid, allow the audience a moment to grasp the full significance of a remark or an exchange, and add emphasis, particularly if two pauses frame a remark.

The pauses in the last scene of *The Birthday Party* draw attention to what Petey and Meg are not saying about the party and the morning after:

> Meg. Where's Stan?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Is Stan down yet, Petey?
> Petey. No ... he's ...
> Meg. Is he still in bed?
> Petey. Yes he's ... still asleep.
> Meg. Still? He'll be late for his breakfast.
> Petey. Let him ... sleep.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Meg. Wasn't it a lovely party last night?
> Petey. I wasn't there.
> Meg. Weren't you?
> Petey. I came in afterwards.
> Meg. Oh.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> It was a lovely party. I haven't laughed so much for years. We had dancing and singing. And games. You should have been there.
> Petey. It was good eh?
>
> *Pause.* (96-97)

Both the hesitations and the pauses indicate Petey's reluctance to tell Meg what has happened to Stanley. They also suggest that Meg suspects the truth but likewise

avoids confronting it. Changing the subject to the previous night's party, she establishes that Petey missed the celebration. The ensuing pause allows us to register this. She then persists in avoiding the unpleasant in her account of it. The last pause indicates that they both know the party was not so lovely. The pauses in this scene underline the collective awareness of both audience and characters that all is not well despite the latter's evasion of the truth.[8]

In addition to focusing the audience's attention on what is not being said, pauses allow the spectators to absorb and to understand the unspoken implications of a particular remark. In *Old Times*, Anna and Deely discuss Kate as if she were not present:

> Deely. Sometimes I take her face in my hands and look at it.
> Anna. Really?
> Deely. Yes, I look at it, holding it in my hands. Then I kind of let it go, take my hands away, leave it floating.
> Kate. My head is quite fixed. I have it on.
> Deely (*to* Anna). It just floats away
> Anna. She was always a dreamer. . . .
> One day she said to me, I've slept through Friday. No you haven't, I said, what do you mean? I've slept right through Friday, she said. But today is Friday, I said, it's been Friday all day, it's now Friday night, you haven't slept through Friday. Yes I have, she said, I've slept right through it, today is Saturday.
> Deely. You mean she literally didn't know what day it was?
> Anna. No.
> Kate. Yes I did. It was Saturday.
>
> *Pause* (20-21)

During this pause, the audience recognizes Kate's defensiveness and its source. Deely and Anna aggravate her by imposing their memory, their perception of her onto her and by discussing her as if she were not there. She deflects this covert aggression by firmly re-asserting her point of view.

Pinter's characters also use pauses deliberately for emphasis. Anna frames a remark intended to unnerve Deely:

> Anna. She floats from the bath. Like a dream.
> Unaware of anyone standing, with her towel,
> waiting for her, waiting to wrap it round her.
> Quite absorbed.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Until the towel is placed on her shoulders.
>
> *Pause.* (50)

She pauses just before the last remark to give it particular emphasis, to ensure Deely does not miss its implications. She suggests some sexual response from Kate when the towel is placed, a response with which Anna appears familiar. The second pause allows Deely to absorb her meaning. She knows it will take him a moment to recover and respond. Pinter's characters capitalize on, manipulate, even create pauses for particular effects.

They also use pauses to elicit some kind of response, usually some kind of reassurance from another character. This is the case in *No Man's Land* during Spooner and Hirst's first conversation:

Spooner. [I am] one of the latter, yes, a man of intelligence and perception. Not one of the former [a man of calculated posture], oh no, not at all. By no means.

Pause.

May I say how very kind it was of you to ask me in? In fact you are kindness itself. . . . To show interest in me, or good gracious, anything tending towards a positive liking of me, would cause in me a condition of the acutest alarm. Fortunately, the danger is remote.

Pause.

I speak to you with this startling candour because you are clearly a reticent man, which appeals, and because you are a stranger to me, and because you are clearly kindness itself.

Pause.

Do you often hang about Hampstead Heath?

Hirst. No. (79-80)

The pauses invite some reaction, some feedback, preferably concurring with Spooner's declarations. Hirst's silence implies his scepticism and even disagreement. It suggests a reluctance to express these sentiments or even antipathy for Spooner and his conceits. Spooner finally resorts to a direct question, to which Hirst, either unwilling to display outright hostility or unwilling to leave the issue ambiguous, finally replies.

Hirst's reluctance to respond to Spooner is one way in which silence functions in Pinter's plays. While Spooner's pauses invite a response, Hirst's silence prompts further talk, further revelation of Spooner's preoccupations and anxieties. The French

playwright, Jean-Jacques Bernard, working early in the twentieth century, was one of the first to focus on the silent figure in his theoretical criticism as well as in his plays.[9] A silent figure can draw attention to an issue everyone onstage avoids. In his play *Martine*, the title character watches her former beau with his new wife. Though she is silent, the audience is aware of her unhappiness. Her silence also stirs a knowing uneasiness in the happy couple. Both Bernard and Pinter write about another paradoxical kind of silence:

> There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. . . . The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. (Pinter "Writing for the Theatre" 14)

Any one of the longer speeches quoted in this section on linguistic codes - Max's chopper and slab speech, Mick's interior decorator monologue, Deely's beautiful people tirade - illustrates this torrent of language beneath which swirl the frustrations, fears and hatreds, the hopes, intentions and passions which obsess so many of his characters.

Silence also functions simply as an extended pause, performing the same functions as a pause: it draws attention to the subtext; it allows the stage listener and the audience time to grasp the significance of a remark; it adds emphasis. A silence is more intense than a pause, however, so Pinter reserves these for moments requiring particular force. When Petey in *The Birthday Party* demands where Goldberg and McCann are taking Stanley, the two turn, followed by a heavy silence before Goldberg replies (95). The gravity of Petey's challenge and the magnitude of the

threat these men pose to Stanley and now Petey register during these heart-stopping moments. Similarly, Davies, in *The Caretaker*, finally pushes Aston too far by telling him to build his "stinking shed," to which Aston responds, "That's not a stinking shed" (77). During the ensuing, ominous silence, the action reaches a turning point as the fatality of Davies' mistake is recognized and the impending strength with which Aston will insist on his final rejection is anticipated.

Dawick notes how silences in *The Caretaker* "introduce or close key sequences or mark significant turning points in the action." The last example from *The Caretaker* is one such instance. In *The Homecoming* Dawick finds that silences display a clearer, better defined structural function (38). Their occurrence with exits and entrances is more consistent, distinguishing sequences and encounters as units of action and awareness (the latter on the part of both characters and the audience - Dawick 42-43). They emphasize the moments of realignment and readjustment at the end of one sequence and the beginning of the next. Only silence can restrain the outbreak of physical aggression once the tension has reached its height. Then, either a character leaves, allowing those remaining to realign themselves, or another one enters. Sensing the tension, the newcomer may try to alleviate it with a new, perhaps neutral subject, forcing all onstage to readjust their present relationships (Dawick 43). In *Old Times* Pinter dispenses with the exits and entrances, using only the silences to signal a realignment. Kate, for instance, implies her acquiescence to Anna's continuous indirect pressure to revive their pre-marital friendship by ignoring Deely's protest about Sicily. She repeats her question:

Kate (*to* Anna). Do you like the Sicilian people?

Anna *stares at her.*

Silence.

Anna (*quietly*). Don't let's go out tonight . . . (39)

During this silence, Anna and the audience recognize and assess the meaning of Kate's words. Anna then consciously adopts the attitude and conversation common to their younger days and friendship in London. Silence becomes a marker for the audience, signalling a key moment, a key shift in the volatile relationships onstage.

The linguistic elements themselves, be they rhetorical devices, implicatures, stresses etc. have long populated dramatic texts. The manner in which the subtextual playwrights incorporate these elements and subsequently encode information subtextually is new. Conversational implicatures no doubt abound in plays written before the modern period, but the audience usually possesses sufficient expositional information to absorb and to process the implications, an advantage the Pinter audience especially does not enjoy. Formerly paralinguistic features such as tone, stress and volume tended to complement dialogue, clarifying rather than contradicting or confusing the audience as they increasingly do in absurdist drama. Hesitations and particularly pauses and silences are rarely, if ever designated in the dialogue before the modern period. Audiences have had to learn the importance and function of these elements. Rhetorical devices are certainly not new, but the need to interpret these as "figurative *acts*" (Elam 177) rather than as literary patterns alone is perhaps even

more important in considering subtextual material. Even the diction patterns in Pinter's plays are distinct from traditional patterns in their focus on revealing character and unspoken preoccupations rather than ideas. In considering linguistic coding in subtextual plays, traditional approaches to analysing what is said and whether this is clearly articulated must be abandoned; we must focus even more on how something is said and whether there is any discrepancy between the two and between these and their context.

Systemic Codes

In addition to listening to the dialogue and interpreting the linguistic codes, a spectator of a play must observe the action and process what Elam identifies as the systemic codes. Within this group of signs, Elam includes the physical elements of production: kinesic codes (characters' facial expressions and gestures); proxemic codes (characters' spatial interrelationships); pictorial or scenic codes (set design and props); costumic codes; and musical codes. In "Non-Verbal Communication in Human Social Interaction," Michael Argyle classifies non-verbal behaviour under ten headings. Most of these are relevant to this study. The non-verbal aspects of speech have already been discussed as paralinguistics. Gestures, looking, head nods and facial expression are all kinesic codes. Bodily contact, proximity, posture and orientation are proxemic codes. The last of Argyle's categories, appearance, falls under what Elam labels costumic codes. As with pragmatic and paralinguistic codes, we can identify how we encode non-verbal communication (relating to systemic codes in performance) in everyday situations and then examine how this is presented and modified onstage. These codes in themselves usually convey unarticulated information about the characters. Additionally, their interaction with words, how they complement or contradict what is said imparts much subtextual meaning.

Kinesic Codes

Despite Artaud and other director-theorists who wished to elevate gesture over language, the former remains subsidiary, usually dependent on language. Unlike Eastern theatre which uses specific gestures to represent specific meanings in a rigidly semiotic signing, Western kinesic coding onstage is much more fluid, even demonstrating cross-cultural variations through which playwright, director and actor all contribute to a performance which is ultimately transitory.[10] Still, there are certain gestures and movements which have acquired certain meanings within a particular culture, and when a subtextual playwright selects specific gestures to complement or contradict the language or context, he encodes non-verbal meaning that very often contributes to the subtext of the play.

Kinesic activity includes facial expressions, head nods, gestures and looking or gazing. Much everyday kinesic behaviour facilitates verbal exchanges through acknowledgement, agreement and clarification (illustrating size or shape for example). Head nodding, looking to and away from the speaker or auditor, hand gestures and body shifts can signal engagement or distraction, or express emotional states such as anger (clenching fists) and attitudes such as impatience (toe tapping). While nods and facial expressions could complement or contradict a character's words, these are rarely designated or significant to subtext. On the other hand, Pinter frequently suffuses gaze or bodily gestures and their complementarity and discrepancy with the dialogue with unspoken meaning.

Argyle sees the gaze as "a signal in starting encounters, in greetings, as a reinforcer, and to indicate that a point has been understood" (251). Looking at someone can also declare an interest in that person, be it clinical interest, aggression or sexual attraction. Of these functions, Pinter uses looking to reinforce or acknowledge a point, to express aggression, confrontation and sexual interest.

An example of the confrontational and reinforcing functions of the "look" occurs near the beginning of *The Homecoming* when Sam looks at Max to underline the insult he delivers in ignoring him:

> Max. I'm here, too, you know.
>
> Sam *looks at him.*
>
> I said I'm here, too. I'm sitting here.
> Sam. I know you're here.
>
> *Pause.* (28)

Instead of simply maintaining his gaze on Lenny, his listener, Sam turns it on Max, underlining his insult with a brazen defiance. A little later, Max counters one of Lenny's many insults:

> Max. I'll give you a proper tuck up one of these nights,
> son. You mark my word.
>
> *They look at each other.* (33)

Max delivers this threat and Lenny acknowledges it with a penetrating look coupled with an exit and a silence for emphasis. Deely and Anna share a similar look at the end of the first act of *Old Times*: "Deely *stands looking at* Anna. Anna *turns her head towards him. They look at each other*" (42). During these moments before the

lights fade, the audience senses Deely's absorption of the preceding scene in which Kate seems to retreat into some fantasy that recreates her younger days with Anna. Anna's returning stare expresses defiance. Having their gazes meet, Pinter implies they recognize and are girding themselves for the other's challenge.

In *Old Times* Pinter includes much discussion about looking, gazing and watching which alerts us to this activity and what it means. Deely feigns clinical interest at the beginning of the play, but his main interest is in dominating Kate:

> Deely. Are you looking forward to seeing her?
> Kate. No.
> Deely. I am. I shall be very interested.
> Kate. In what?
> Deely. In you. I'll be watching you.
> Kate. Me? Why?
> Deely. To see if she's the same person.
> Kate. You think you'll find that out through me?
> Deely. Definitely.
>
> *Pause*. (7-8)

To be watched is an unnerving experience. Pinter uses this here to demonstrate how Deely attempts to control Kate. Deely seems to want to discover more than he claims. He is interested in Anna and the nature of his wife's former friendship with her, presumably so he can control it in the present. With a self-conscious choice of words, Anna suggests that there was once something more than simple friendship and that she would like to rekindle that something:

> Anna. Sometimes I'd look at her face, but she was quite unaware of my gaze. (22)

* * * *

> Anna. How can you say that, when I'm looking at you now, seeing you so shyly poised over me, looking down at me - (31)

Anna's gaze, her very choice of the word "gaze" to describe her particular look, is sexually suggestive. A sexual gaze can also be a possessive, dominating one. Deely counters this threat by appropriating her diction, claiming he gazed up her skirt at a tavern years before. A cold tone of voice, a brief hesitation and anaphora allow Pinter to convey a sense of the denigration and humiliation Anna "remembers" and the animosity with which she now exclaims:

> Anna (*coldly*). Oh, it was my skirt. It was me. I remember your look . . very well. I remember you well. (67)

Kate also knows the importance of looking, gazing and watching. She ultimately rejects Anna's overtures by recounting their last parting, telling her that she had watched her, had examined her while rejecting her. Obviously, the significance of looking, gazing and watching develops special overtones in this particular play. But in developing these overtones, Pinter draws specific attention to the power of the gaze to engage, challenge and reject, which are relevant to his other plays as well as to other playwright's works.

Other gestures can best be examined with Pfister's ideas on the relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication in mind. According to Pfister this relationship can assume three forms in a dramatic performance: identity, complementarity and discrepancy (45-49). In the case of identity, the stage directions for movement are essentially included in the dialogue (as in much of Shakespeare),

or, as in Beckett's *Happy Days*, the actions described in the stage directions are identical to the words:

> Winnie. (*Pause. She takes up a mirror.*) I take up this little glass, I shiver it on a stone - (*does so*) - I throw it away (*does so far behind her*) . . . (39)

Most dramatic action, however, complements the dialogue, clarifying and or emphasizing what is said. Though Pfister concedes that complementary non-verbal communication relativizes or qualifies the dialogue, I would take this one step further and suggest that in a subtextual play the clarification or emphasis functions deictically, pointing to something underlying the exchange or situation. So when Meg announces the imminent arrival of two strangers in *The Birthday Party*, Stanley's reaction suggests something more than simple curiosity:

> Meg. I've got to get things in for the two gentlemen.
>
> *A pause.* Stanley *slowly raises his head. He speaks without turning.*
>
> Stanley. What two gentlemen?
> Meg. I'm expecting visitors.
>
> *He turns.*
>
> Stanley. What?
> Meg. You didn't know about that, did you?
> Stanley. What are you talking about? (29-30)

Stanley's reaction is decidedly one of fear, and this fear is first signalled by his raised but unturned head, then confirmed in his sudden turn towards Meg. Nothing in the play to this point even so much as hints at menace; Stanley's behaviour following this moment consistently conveys his fear.

While identity and complementarity of verbal and non-verbal communication consistently appear in drama throughout history, a new emphasis on discrepancy emerges as a peculiarly modern phenomenon (Pfister 48). Pfister defines discrepancy as not just,

> any contradiction that may occur between a character's words and his or her actions since these can often be understood psychologically and thus be resolved by the receiver. . . . Instead, we understand it to be a radical and unresolvable discrepancy between verbally and non-verbally transmitted pieces of information. (48)

He regards this innovation as breaking the fundamental Aristotelian principles of "dramatic textualization." He cites the scene in which Vladimir and Estragon express a desire to leave but remain fixed on the spot. Claiming that this discrepancy "can no longer be explained in purely psychological terms as evidence of Estragon's and Vladimir's indecisiveness or of the incompatibility of their desire and capabilities," he proposes that it is "an ideological position in which the very possibility of intentional action - and thus one of the key precepts of Aristotelian dramatic theory - has become problematic" (48-49). Pinter also draws on the innovative dramatic possibilities of discrepancy. In a now (in)famous scene from *The Homecoming*, the discrepancy between Max's words and Ruth's behaviour raises more than just eyebrows:

> Lenny *sits on the arm of the sofa. He caresses* Ruth's *hair as* Joey *embraces her . . .*
>
> Joey *lies heavily on* Ruth.
> *They are almost still.*
> Lenny *caresses her hair.*
>
> Max. Listen, you think I don't know why you didn't tell

> me you were married? I know why. You were ashamed. You thought I'd be annoyed because you married a woman beneath you. . . .
>
> *He peers to see* Ruth's *face under* Joey, *turns back to* Teddy.
>
> Mind you, she's a lovely girl. A beautiful woman. And a mother too. A mother of three. You've made a happy woman out of her. It's something to be proud of. I mean we're talking about a woman of quality. We're talking about a woman of feeling.
>
> Joey *and* Ruth *roll off the sofa onto the floor.* (75-76)

If we accept Max's tone as serious, irony lies not in a discrepancy between what he says and how he says it, but in the discrepancy between his words and Ruth's behaviour. It would be difficult to resolve this discrepancy with a simple psychological explanation largely because such an explanation would be appropriate only to a naturalistic or realistic play. Despite the everyday, familiar ordinariness of Pinter's characters and settings, the plot, the action of a Pinter play remains decidedly unnatural. This scene cannot be understood in naturalistic terms. If one identifies the subtext of power and the potential role sex plays in the negotiation of power between men and women, the meaning of this scene becomes clearer. Thus, parodic discrepancy (Rovenţa-Frumuşani 323) becomes a new mode of encoding that draws attention to and contributes to the subtext.

Proxemic Codes

The second systemic code, that of proxemics, involves the spatial relations involved in performance. American anthropologist Edward T. Hall defines proxemics as "the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture" (*The Hidden Dimension* 1). Beginning with the notion that the use of space is not arbitrary or even simply functional, Hall and others claim it, as Elam so succinctly states, "represents a semiotically loaded choice subject to powerful rules which generate a range of (connotative) cultural units" (62). Hall divides proxemics into three areas of study: the fixed-feature, the semi-fixed-feature and the informal. Elam relates these three divisions to drama:

> Fixed feature space involves, broadly, static architectural configurations. In the theatre it will relate chiefly to the playhouse itself and, in formal theatre (opera houses, proscenium-arch theatres, etc.), to the shapes and dimensions of stage and auditorium. Semi-fixed-feature space concerns such movable but non-dynamic objects as furniture, and so in theatrical terms involves the set, auxiliary factors like the lighting and, in informal theatrical spaces, stage and auditorium arrangements. The third proxemic mode, informal space, has as its units the ever-shifting relations of proximity and distance between individuals, thus applying, in the theatre, to actor-actor, actor-spectator and spectator-spectator interplay. (62-63)

Intriguing as the impact of theatre design would be, fixed-feature proxemics regrettably falls outside the parameters of this study which focuses strictly on dramatic codes, ie those specified in the text by the playwright. The semi-fixed-feature mode overlaps considerably with another of the systemic codes, the scenic or

pictorial code. Thus, for the purposes of this study, proxemic codes shall refer to informal interspatial relations. Again, the parameters of dramatic codes exclude the spectator-spectator element of this mode, leaving us to focus mainly on the actor-actor relationship with occasional reference to that between actor and spectator.

As previously noted, four of Argyle's ten non-verbal communication classifications are proxemic in nature: bodily contact, proximity, orientation and posture. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, such interspatial relationships are highly culturally-coded. Often we remain unaware of such coding until it is broken by someone of another culture. For instance, northern Europeans usually stand farther apart during face to face conversations than Latin Americans or Arabs. The distances may only differ by two or three inches, but the psychological consequences are much greater (Argyle 246-47). Much of this culturally coded behaviour is transferred onto the stage and interpreted by the audience, though some additional dramatic conventions have been developed by playwrights, directors and actors which have been absorbed by audiences. Both the codes from everyday life and from the stage contribute to the subtext of the plays.

Argyle observes that *bodily contact*, the first of these proxemic codes,

> may take a number of forms - hitting, punching, stroking, etc. - most of which may involve a variety of areas of the body. There are great cross-cultural variations in the extent to which bodily contact occurs; in Britain and Japan there is very little, whilst amongst Africans and Arabs there is a lot. The most common bodily contact to occur in public settings in Britain is that involved in greetings and farewells. (246-47)

When McCann introduces himself to Stanley, he offers his hand but holds the grip until Stanley withdraws his hand. With this slightest of alterations in the standard greeting, Pinter encodes a threatening message from the Irishman for Stanley which the audience also interprets. The way Meg ruffles Stanley's hair and strokes his arm betrays her attraction to the boarder who brushes away her unwelcome caresses. We easily recognize and understand this kind of behaviour. On the other hand, in the scene from *The Homecoming* examined above, Ruth dances, kisses, embraces, caresses and lies down with her brothers-in-law, transgressing the cultural taboos regulating which contact is allowed and between whom. The total break with these behavioral codes is initially confusing and can only be understood in terms of the subtext of sex and power. Ruth's messages, which Pinter encodes in her actions, are confusing because of the discrepancy between them and their context rather than because of any unfamiliarity with the actions themselves.

Hall divides another of the proxemic codes, *proximity*, or the space between people, into four distances: intimate distance, personal distance, social distance and public distance. Intimate distance is close (up to eighteen inches), usually with some form of contact. Personal distance (one and a half to four feet) is "the distance consistently separating the members of non-contact species . . . a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others" (112). Social distance (four to twelve feet) is that kept between people working together or "attending a casual social gathering" (114). The more formal the business or social discourse, the greater the distance (within the twelve feet). Public distance (greater

than twelve feet) is that used on public occasions and, in the case of most theatrical performances, is only relevant in terms of actor-spectator distance. "The specific distance chosen depends on the transaction; the relationship of the interacting individuals, how they feel, and what they are doing" (120). While Argyle claims that most shifts in proximity arise from a desire to initiate or to terminate an encounter, we find that on the stage such a shift is charged with additional semiotic meaning. Pinter uses such shifts to signal overtures, acknowledgements, threats and uneasiness. When Lenny enters Ruth's intimate space in *The Homecoming* by dancing with her, he implies a proposal to change the nature of their relationship. Her responding to his kiss and, thereby, maintaining their intimate proximity, acknowledges that change, leading to Ruth's intimate-distance-sharing with Joey as well. However, most of Pinter's characters maintain, at the least, personal and more often social distance, while still sending messages to one another. In the scene from *The Birthday Party* in which McCann shakes Stanley's hand, holding the grip, McCann subsequently engages in a menacing dance with Stanley, matching each of his moves and preventing him from leaving the house (49). Mick threateningly circles Davies in *The Caretaker*, before metaphysically striking him with a dismissal (82). Many of the shifts also signal discomfiture, a desire to avoid or to change a subject. Whenever Anna, Deely or Kate in *Old Times* grow uneasy or disturbed, they move to a window or to make drinks. Thus, Pinter uses these shifts in proximity both deictically and symbolically to convey a sense of the characters' interrelations.

The third proxemic code, *posture*,

> is used to convey interpersonal attitudes: . . . distinctive postures [are] adopted for friendly, hostile, superior, and inferior attitudes, and . . . [these are] perceived accordingly. Thus posture can be a signal for status; someone who is going to take charge sits in an upright posture (and in a central position, facing the others). Posture varies with emotional state, especially along the dimension tense-relaxed. . . . posture is less well controlled than face or voice, and there may be 'leakage', as, for example, when anxiety does not affect the face, but can be seen in posture. (Argyle 248)

Such is the case at the end of the first act of *The Birthday Party*, when Meg presents Stanley with his birthday present, a toy drum, and asks for a kiss: "*He walks back towards her slowly. He stops at her chair, looking down upon her. Pause. His shoulders sag, he bends and kisses her on the cheek*" (46). Pinter uses Stanley's sagging shoulders not only to signal capitulation to Meg, but also to foreshadow his defeat at the hands of the two strangers.

Standing, sitting and lying are closely related to *orientation*. The latter relates to,

> the angle at which people sit or stand in relation to each other. The normal range is from head-on to side-by-side, and . . . has been found to vary with the nature of the situation - those who are in a cooperative situation or who are close friends adopt a side-by-side position; in a confrontation, bargaining or similar situation, people tend to choose head-on; while in other situations 90 is most common in England and the USA. . . . The main exception to this is that two close friends will sit head-on when eating. (Argyle 247)

Sitting Stanley with his back to the audience, Pinter emphasizes the confrontational orientation of his interlocutors in *The Birthday Party*. He draws on the familiar

associations this image conjures of Nazi or Soviet interrogations. However, Pinter's exploitation of the confrontational implications of head-on orientation is not always this overt. In scene seven of *Betrayal*, Jerry and Robert sit opposite one another during lunch, the supposed exception to the confrontational nature of this positioning. Superficially, the men appear to be good friends sharing a meal and some conversation. However, Jerry has been having an affair with his best friend's wife but is unaware that Robert knows. Thus the underlying tension, the subtext of the scene, in other words, is adversarial. Using the head-on-orientation at the lunch table with its two connotations of close friendship and confrontation, Pinter perfectly embodies the actual state of their relationship.

Pinter frequently imbues the orientations of standing, sitting and lying down with symbolic meaning. When Goldberg and McCann first arrive at the boarding house in *The Birthday Party*, they quibble over who should sit down:

> Goldberg. Don't worry yourself, McCann. Take a seat.
> McCann. What about you?
> Goldberg. What about me?
> McCann. Are you going to take a seat?
> Goldberg. We'll both take a seat. (37)

Although we might not initially comprehend the full significance of this altercation, Pinter uses their arguments, here and later with the reluctant Stanley, deictically to focus our attention on the importance of standing and sitting:

> McCann. Nat.
> Goldberg. What?
> McCann. He won't sit down.
> Goldberg. Well, ask him.
> McCann. I've asked him.
> Goldberg. Ask him again.

McCann (*to* Stanley). Sit down.
Stanley. Why?
McCann. You'd be more comfortable.
Stanley. So would you.

Pause.

McCann. All right. If you will I will.
Stanley. You first.

McCann *slowly sits at the table, left.*

McCann. Well?
Stanley. Right. Now you've both had a rest you can get out! (56-57)

Beneath this childishness lies a serious principle. Later, during the interrogation, when the two intruders crush Stanley's spirit, they stand over him in a symbolic sign of domination. The ease with which Goldberg and McCann impel Stanley to sit during the party (65) and the next morning (91) underlines his submission.

Sitting in a less overtly menacing context, however, implies an air of confidence, security. Ruth is initially reluctant to sit down in *The Homecoming*, but once she finds her bearings among her husband's family in his childhood home, she sits secure and confident throughout much of the play. In *Old Times* Deely tries to dominate his wife and her friend by standing while they sit, but he succeeds only in betraying his uneasiness with his nervous movements around the room. Anna sits through most of the first Act, but after Deely's claim in Act II to have met her in a tavern, she spends more time on her feet. The most secure of the three, Kate, generally remains seated except in brief moments of agitation.

Lying down is the weakest position of all in Pinter's plays. At the end of *The Homecoming*, for instance, Sam's collapse symbolizes his now total loss of power through having divulged his secret (Dawick 41). At the beginning of Act III of *The Caretaker*, Mick lies down feigning trust, reassuring Davies with the vulnerability lying down implies, luring him into reciprocating that trust. In *The Homecoming*, Ruth responds to Lenny's domineering tactics, a threat to take away her glass, by inviting him to assume this highly vulnerable position:

> *She picks up the glass and lifts it towards him.*
>
> Ruth. Have a sip. Go on. Have a sip from my glass.
>
> *He is still.*
>
> Sit on my lap. Take a long cool sip.
>
> *She pats her lap. Pause.*
> *She stands, moves to him with the glass.*
>
> Put your head back and open your mouth.
> Lenny. Take that glass away from me.
> Ruth. Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat. (50)

Ruth challenges him to trust her by placing himself in a vulnerable position, allowing her the position of power, of control. Lastly, Anna's prostrate figure on the couch at the end of *Old Times* signals her defeat by Kate and her last story.

To underline the importance of these interspatial relations, Pinter often indicates that certain positions are to be held as a tableau. The proscenium arch serves as a frame for these pictures which are intended to be read or decoded. The final scene in *The Homecoming* resembles a rather bizarre family portrait: Sam

motionless on the floor; Lenny standing off to one side; Ruth seated at centre; Joey kneeling at her feet with his head in her lap; Max kneeling beside Ruth's chair; Teddy absent having just departed (96-89). Each posture and orientation is indicative of each character's position in the family's new power structure. Sam's prostrate figure denotes weakness, impotence. Lenny's stance suggests domination, at least over the kneeling and lying figures. His position off to one side, however, qualifies his power. Unable to dominate Ruth, his standing implies a resistance to her and might even suggest a future bid to dominate the family. Ruth sits with confidence at centre stage, a queen upon her throne, the kneeling men her subjects (Nelson 156). Joey kneels at Ruth's feet, while Max kneels off to one side, a less privileged position. Joey's willingness to kneel contrasts with Max's resistance and his subsequent collapse to that kneeling position. Although the old man displays some lingering defiance in the way he straightens himself even while kneeling, his resistance remains diminished. Teddy is physically and metaphysically out of the picture. Throughout the play we have followed the changing relationships resulting from Teddy's visit to his family with his wife. The last image provides a pictorial resolution, visually outlining the new family hierarchy.[11] In addition to complaints concerning a lack of exposition in Pinter's plays, there have been others about the absence of resolution. Yet, in the ever-changing nature of human relationships, the characters here have reached as close a resolution as is possible, a stable though temporary, plateau.

Pinter punctuates *Old Times* with several tableaux, marking the shifts in the characters' relationships. The play opens with three figures perceived in the dim light.

> Deely *slumped in armchair, still.*
> Kate *curled on a sofa, still.*
> Anna *standing at the window, looking out.* (3)

Anna, the outsider, is looking out the window at centre back, a felt presence during the first exchange between husband and wife rather than an active participant. Both Deely and Kate are positioned to one side so that no one occupies the dominant position of centre stage. At the close of Act I, Kate has left the room; Anna sits composed on a sofa; Deely the outsider, stands, excluded from Anna's and Kate's recent conversation. Anna, with deliberation, turns her head to return Deely's menacing stare. As mentioned before, each girds herself/himself for the coming battle over the now absent Kate. After Kate's story near the end of the play in which Anna is dead, the latter lies down, rejected, powerless. Kate tolerates Deely who, diminished by Kate's declaration that their wedding, their new life together is of no significance, lies submissively across her lap. Kate remains seated upright at centre, dominating the other two. The uneasy balance of the opening tableau, in which no one seems to dominate, is somewhat resolved in a new balance in this last image. Pinter underlines its significance with the sudden bright lights at the very end.

Scenic Codes

As I noted earlier, the semi-fixed mode of proxemics overlaps with what Elam refers to as pictorial or scenic codes in the theatre. If anthropologists feel that the manner in which we arrange and use our space is reflective of our personalities and relationships, this effect, as everything else in performance, is only heightened onstage. The late nineteenth-century interest in naturalism led to the incorporation of as much real decoration, furniture and props as possible on the stage. And just as the interest in naturalistic acting led from artificial rhetorical conventions to subtextual linguistic, kinesic and proxemic coding, so too an interest in naturalistic scenes led to a new subtextual coding using rooms, furniture and props. In *Hedda Gabler*, for instance, the rooms and their contents reflect Hedda's personality. The handsome but dark furnishings of the two rooms reveal Hedda's aristocratic but sombre tastes. The usually drawn curtains give a feeling of gloomy claustrophobia. She objects to both the sunshine and the flowers which brighten the room. She impractically dispenses with the chintz furniture covers indicating that the newlyweds will be using this room for everyday living, an extravagance to which Aunt Julle and Berthe draw overt attention. The smaller inner room seems almost a sanctuary with her prized possessions: her father's portrait, her piano and her pistols. In its triple frame (picture frame, wide doorway to the inner room and the proscenium arch), her father's portrait dominates the rooms, symbolically reflecting his domination of her life. The aristocratic figure in the painting reminds us of her heritage and underlines

our awareness of her drop in status. Her pistols embody not only the male world from which she is excluded, but also the danger and excitement she craves. Thus, Ibsen uses scenic codes to complement what we learn about Hedda.[12] The naturalistic setting iconically and deictically reveals the superficial circumstances of Hedda's position: comfortable upper-middle class. At the same time, elements such as the portrait, the pistols, the drawn curtains symbolically suggest her inner emotional reality. In *Waiting for Godot* Beckett's set is almost entirely symbolic, expressing "*in a concrete manner* psychic experiences of an emotional nature" (Rovenţa-Frumuşani's italics 319-20).[13] The desolation of the stage reflects that of the characters' spirits. In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter reintroduces the iconic realistic setting as part of the deceptive ordinariness conveyed in costume, character and action at the beginning of the play, which he later disrupts with bizarre and frightening events. The boarding house, like so many of Pinter's rooms, is initially a sanctuary for Stanley. Goldberg and McCann, like so many of Pinter's outsiders, intrude upon, disrupt and remove him from this sanctuary. We have already seen how the arrangement of furniture in Pinter generally reflects the power relationships. Doors and windows too are semiotically charged; in coming and going and gazing out, characters remind us of the potential threat from the outside which could destroy their cosy world inside, or, as in *The Homecoming* and *Old Times*, at the least shake up the status quo. The initial ordinariness of Pinter's setting reminds us that we too may be subject to such forces, to such threats as the characters face in the play.

Costumic Codes

Costumic codes function iconically, indexically and symbolically in much the same manner as the scenic codes. In the earlier naturalistic dramas, clothing complemented the characters' personalities. In *The Cherry Orchard*, for example, the characters dress according to their station. Trofimov's shabbiness embodies his idealistic anti-materialism. In the absurdist plays, the clothing prompts us to interpret information about the characters which will subsequently be subverted. Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot* dress in typical Vaudeville Chaplinesque fashion, but their propensity for contemplative thought undermines an initial expectation for simple slapstick comedy. Moreover, their appearance initially encourages us to see them as outsiders, different to us.[14] But when we perceive that their metaphysical concerns reflect our own, we begin to re-evaluate our perceptions of ourselves and our predicament, to see ourselves more as simple clowns in an inexplicable tragi-comedy. On the other hand, Pinter's characters, except perhaps in *Betrayal*, resemble us in appearance, but act unpredictably. Because we identify with their ordinariness at the beginning, we find ourselves looking at our own behaviour and relationships in a new light after witnessing the rather disturbing behaviour and relationships onstage. Thus Beckett and Pinter's costumic codes establish expectations through complementarity, only to subvert these through discrepancy which then encourages re-evaluation.

Musical Codes

The last of the systemic codes are the musical codes. Through music, a playwright can evoke emotions and associations. In *Old Times*, Pinter evokes a nostalgia for an earlier time. Deely and Anna sing a line or two from numerous songs dating back to the 1930's.[15] Both hope to inspire in Kate a nostalgia for an earlier period in her life when Anna lived with her and when Deely first met her. The two begin by exchanging lines, cutting one another off in a metaphoric tug-of-war, hoping to capture Kate's attention. The conflict escalates when one or the other finishes the song the other starts. So when Anna sings, "You are the promised kiss of springtime ..." Deely skips to the last two lines of "All the Things You Are," singing, "And someday I'll know you that moment divine,/ When all things you are, are mine!" (23). He does this again with "I Get A Kick Out Of You," but Anna interrupts him in turn with the last line of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." However, Deely ends the contest, breaking off the last line of "These Foolish Things" to launch into his reminiscence of the day he and Kate met. That Deely finishes the song exchanges both on this occasion and in Act Two, when they sing "They Can't Take That Away From Me," foreshadows Kate's rejection of Anna and tolerance of Deely. The themes of these songs deal with loneliness, possession, abandonment, longing, memory and looking, all subtextual concerns of this play's characters. As noted, the characters spend much time gazing at one another, even discussing the nature of gazing which is intricately caught up in their individual longings. Both Anna and

Deely desire to possess Kate; each fears loneliness; each uses memories, real or imagined, to appeal to her, to threaten and discredit one another. Kate's indifference to loneliness and her ultimate mastery of "memory" allow her to remain free of the other two's domination. Thus, these songs embody the characters' preoccupations as well as function symbolically as part of the conflict between Anna and Deely.

Musical codes also figure prominently in Stoppard's *The Real Thing*.[16] Like Pinter's characters, Stoppard's occasionally sing subtextually pointed lines. Reminiscent of the manner in which Anna and Deely's conflict is embodied in song snatches, Max in the "House of Cards" indicates an unspoken conflict between his character and Charlotte's when he croons a line from "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" (10). Another snippet functions ironically when Max gives a rather painful rendition of "You've Lost That Loving Feeling," unaware that Charlotte, Henry and Annie have indeed lost that feeling with their respective spouses. When Max confronts Annie with the evidence of her infidelity, this tune is playing on the radio as part of a Desert Island Discs program focusing on Henry. Thus, musical codes also function thematically, underlining the emotions and situations of the characters. "I'm Into Something Good" played at the end of scene two reflects Henry's feelings about his affair with Annie, while "I'm A Believer" at the end of the play expresses his hope that the two have indeed found "real" love. Musical codes are intimately intertwined with the play's subtextual questioning of what is real. Henry agonizes over his musical selections the following week's Desert Island Discs. He worries that his preference for pop music, which he fears is inferior to classical music, will

undermine his image as a serious artist and, consequently, his plays as serious art. His delight in discovering that Bach has "lifted" his "Air on a G String" (the pun in this title must have particularly tickled Stoppard's sense of wit) from Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" highlights this question of which version, which form of music is more "real" and by what criteria we judge it to be so. Henry's decision to use the pop song for Desert Island Discs - Herman's Hermits plays initially plays in the background when Max confronts Annie about the affair - contrasts with the compromises he makes in writing *Zadok* and Brodie's plays. The play's musical codes, like all the other codes, leave these questions unresolved.

Aesthetic Codes

In learning how to decode the new linguistic and systemic coding, spectators become aware of a second level of conflict running beneath the surface action of a play. But to discover the full subtextual meaning of these plays, we must also learn to decode the new aesthetic coding - ethical, structural and generic -which is the foundation on which any play is built. Just as the new linguistic and systemic coding leads the spectator to the conflict underlying the action, changes in the aesthetic coding lead to a new locus of conflict in the spectator himself. Though some of these changes are reversions to, or modifications of, the experimental coding of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans (for instance the blending of tragedy and comedy into tragicomedy), most are radical departures from the coding that dominated mainstream Victorian drama. By the nineteenth century, aesthetic codes had become over-coded to such a high degree that adjustments were met with confusion and even anger. Ibsen's modifications to the ethical coding were vehemently denounced. Chekhov's modified structural coding drew bemused observations that "nothing happens." That Stanislavsky interpreted *The Cherry Orchard* more as a tragedy even while Chekhov insisted that the play was a comedy bears witness to the emerging or rediscovered blended form of tragicomedy which would prove essential to subtext in the following century. These adjustments to the aesthetic coding placed greater demands on the audience, not only because information was encoded in an unfamiliar manner requiring the spectator to develop new decoding skills, but also because these new

skills themselves required a greater degree of active participation. Victorian ethical coding demanded recognition and acknowledgement of characters who were fairly straightforward moral types. The structural coding adhered to a closed form which guided the audience through the dramatic events according to a familiar pattern dating back to Aristotle. The generic coding influenced the audience's receptivity, signalling the kind of response necessary for the experience of the play. The new aesthetic coding often denies the audience these signposts, the map which traditionally leads the audience through the dramatic experience. The conflict onstage is now accompanied by a conflict within the spectator himself as he struggles to evaluate the moral implications of the characters and their actions, to find order and pattern in the action and to formulate his response to these.

Ethical Codes

Ethical coding since the Restoration has been largely founded on an unspoken concurrence between playwright and audience concerning the morality of the characters, their actions and the latter's consequences. Characters who epitomize morally reprehensible qualities, such as hypocrisy, or who cross moral boundaries in the interest of, say, greed or ambition necessarily suffer some ignominious fall or punishment. The virtuous sometimes receive reward, sometimes endure suffering and even death, but always invite sympathy if not approbation. We easily separate the admirably good from the unfortunately misguided from the maliciously evil. This

simplicity is discarded by modern subtextual dramatists whose characters resist straightforward moral decoding.

This increasing complexity is partially generated by naturalism's move toward individual character conceptualization. Pfister divides character conceptualization into three categories: the personification, the type and the individual. A character who is a *personification* illustrates a single abstract concept. In a medieval allegory, for instance, the personification of a vice "is fully subsumed in the function of illustrating the causes and effects of that vice" (179). The *type* represents "a whole set of qualities" which nevertheless "represent some universal or typical supra-individual quality" (179-80). Jonson's humour characters, as well as stock figures such as the country squire and the *miles gloriosus,* are types. The *individual* expresses a range of qualities that make him or her unique. Naturalism tends to feature this conceptualization of character with its multi-level presentation of appearance, speech, behaviour, biography etc. "Here the figure is no longer an allegorical personification exemplifying a certain concept and no longer an illustration of a particular social or psychological type, but represents itself in all the complexities and contingencies of reality" (180). This complexity holds the potential for a new kind of character who resists traditional categorization and interpretation based on clearly delineated, simplified moral values or stereotypes.

For instance, we are often hard-pressed to distinguish villain from victim in Pinter's plays.[17] We might regard Davies, the tramp in *The Caretaker*, as a victim caught in a cruel game perpetrated by Mick and Aston. These two appear to have

offered him a home, a job, some security, only to turn him mercilessly back out into the street. On the other hand, Davies' bigotry, his ungratefulness, his attempts to manipulate Aston and to play one brother off the other undermine our sympathy for him. The characters in *The Homecoming* equally resist simple categorization. Is Teddy a victim of his wife and family or a villainous contriver? Is Ruth, at the mercy of a patriarchal society, exploited, or is she an opportunist who will capitalize on the needs of men in order to get what she desires? This ambivalence remains at the heart of our reactions to all of Pinter's characters, both during performance and upon reflection. his characterization resists conventional moral decoding, conflicting with our expectations, expectations nurtured by most traditional and contemporary literary and popular forms of drama, of characters who invite admiration, derision, pity, mockery. The subtextual playwright replaces these familiar characters and their actions with those whose multi-dimensionality transforms the spectator's judgement from simple recognition and acknowledgement to a more active consideration of an insoluble dilemma.

Structural Codes

Just as ethical coding in subtextual plays frustrates spectator expectation, so does structural coding. Since Aristotle, dramatic action has adhered, more or less, to a specific "triadic structure, whose different components consist of the existing situation, the attempt to change it and the new situation" (Pfister 199). As Pfister

points out, this tripartite structure appears as the foundation for most structuralist models of action.[18] In the nineteenth century, Gustav Freytag formulated the now familiar pyramid-like structure which often works in conjunction with the triadic pattern: an exposition precedes an initiating incident which generates the rising action which leads to the climax, after which the falling action winds down to the denouement. Most traditional drama conforms with the tri-partite structure of action and often with Freytag's pyramid structure. Pfister declares this pyramid structure to be a closed form which is ideally "based on a completely self-contained story in which there are no background events to influence the beginning, in which the ending is absolutely final and the presentation of which - the fable or plot - conforms to the Aristotelian demands of unity and totality" (Pfister 240-41). In the twentieth century, playwrights experiment with open form, one that simply departs from and negates the closed form. Pfister observes the proliferation of open forms in much twentieth-century, and certainly in avant-garde, drama. Naturalistic theatre and the theatre of the absurd, the two forms most conducive to subtext, are among those Pfister lists as deviating from the closed form.

While some earlier modern dramatists tinker with what Pfister identifies as the triadic pattern, modifying such aspects as the intention to effect change and the ability to accomplish change (Chekhov and Beckett), Pinter maintains this tri-partite structure. Pinter rightly asserts that he is a traditional playwright in so far as he not only writes for "the normal picture frame stage" he used as an actor, but also in that he is concerned with overall structure and shape ("Writing for Myself" 9, "Writing

for the Theatre" 14). For instance, before Anna's arrival in *Old Times*, Deely appears to be the dominant partner in his marriage with Kate. Upon her arrival, Anna and Deely vie for domination over Kate who, in a climactic monologue, rejects Anna and firmly assumes the dominant role in her relationship with Deely. But while Pinter maintains this triadic pattern, he tampers with the traditional closed form sufficiently to create an open form. First, he withholds the conventional exposition which provides all the once-deemed necessary background information. Without a clear understanding of the characters' individual and collective pasts, the audience often becomes confused by the contradictions and transparent improvisation in which Deely, Kate and Anna indulge while reminiscing. Pinter addresses this need for verification, a need nurtured by traditional structural codes:

> The desire for verification on the part of all of us, with regard to our own experience and the experience of others, is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. . . . A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. ("Writing for the Theatre" 11)

Esslin relates a story taken from the *Daily Mail* about a woman who wrote Pinter a letter requesting the kind of expositional background material audiences have come to expect.

> Dear Sir, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play *The Birthday Party*. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I

> cannot fully understand your play'. Pinter is said to have replied as follows: Dear Madam, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where did you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to your questions I cannot fully understand your letter.
> (*Pinter: A Study of His Plays* 37-38)

This incident bears witness to the strong sense of coding theatre audiences develop. Pinter's refusal to furnish this information focuses the audience's attention more intensely onto the characters' immediate words and actions, on how they say and do these things and on what effect these have on the other characters. In so doing, he focuses attention on the subtext, on the conflicts beneath the surface of conversation. Likewise, his resolutions lack the explanation that ties all the action into a neat conclusion. He pares his final moments to the most essential revelation of a new situation, a new configuration. Though this lack of exposition and resolution initially led audiences and critics to fruitless speculation, the assimilation of a new coding ultimately allows them to focus and reflect instead on the words, actions and underlying conflicts that make up the subtext of Pinter's plays.

Generic Codes

The inclination of much twentieth-century drama toward open form is matched by its inclination toward tragicomedy. The formal blending of tragedy and comedy reaches back at least to the Elizabethan age when Sidney deplored the "mongrel

tragicomedy" which matched "hornpipes and funerals" (*An Apology for Poetry* 142). Despite this purist objection, Hirst observes that this mongrel doggedly reappears in dramatic literature down to our own times, at times more closely resembling one ancestor or the other (tragedy or comedy), but drawing on both. Modern tragicomedies are usually populated by ordinary or even "low" characters whose sometimes almost farcical behaviour leads them to possible or actual disaster but falls short of an overwhelming tragic catastrophe. We have already seen that character conceptualization leans more often toward the rounded individual found more often in tragedy than toward the limited types of comedy. Elizabethan and Jacobean tragicomedy borrows the complex plotting of comedy; its modern counterpart minimizes plotting sometimes to the point, as in Beckett's case, of almost eliminating it.

But more important than the mixing of these formal elements, tragicomedy, particularly modern tragicomedy blends the traditional responses to the two forms:

> Tragedy plays on our emotions, it involves us and demands our sympathy for the protagonist; comedy appeals to our intellect, we observe critically and laugh at the victim. Yet comedy . . . has a greater power to disturb the audience's conventional attitudes, whereas tragedy - certainly justified by Aristotle - purifies, leaving us, in Milton's phrase, 'calm of mind, all passion spent.' (Hirst xi)

Hirst identifies two Elizabethan approaches to mixing these responses:

> [A playwright] can either employ a process of selection which leads to a careful synthesis of elements from the contrasted genres, or - conversely he can create a volatile mix of tragedy and comedy so that different effects are contrasted. In the first case he will produce a play like

> *The Tempest* which, though titillating its audience with the potential of tragedy, spares them the harrowing experience of catharsis and leaves them relaxed and content. In the second case he will produce a play like *The Jew of Malta* which deliberately undermines the audience's feelings, denying them the involvement conducive to a sympathetic response and a consequent purgation of feelings through pity and terror. In the former variety of tragicomedy the emotions are carefully tempered; in the latter they are stirred up and set against one another. (xi-xii)

Modern subtextual tragicomedy follows the second approach. Much of the confusion and anger that historically greets subtextual plays can be traced to this mixing of tragic and comic elements. The spectator finds himself drawn simultaneously into sympathetic identification with not one character (as in tragedy) but with at least two or more (a wider focus more common to comedy). The impulse toward full sympathetic identification, however, is checked by an equally insistent impulse to draw back and analyze the characters' follies.

Of all the modern subtextual plays, Pinter's are marked by a peculiarly violent mix of horror and laughter most reminiscent of the more grotesque Elizabethan and Jacobean tragicomedies. As spectators we are horrified by the vapidity and malevolence exhibited by many of the characters; we are perhaps equally dismayed at our impulse to laugh at the verbal antics which give expression to that which we deplore. Sympathetic identification and detached criticism equally control our response to the characters and their actions. In *The Birthday Party* Stanley is slothful, lying, manipulative and lazy; yet his defiance of Goldberg, who personifies the pressures of society on the individual to conform, forces us to re-evaluate not only his

behaviour but also our initial response to it. Similarly, our appraisal of Goldberg as a sinister, aggressive perpetrator of societal forces is tempered by a realization that he is as much a victim of those pressures as Stanley. In Pinter, the impulse to laugh complicates our horror; simultaneously, the comic impulse to categorize and analyse collides with a tragic impulse to identify and sympathise with the characters. While many spectators revolt against this disconcerting mix of tragic and comic, Ubersfeld examines why many others return to the theatre to experience this conflict again:

> When tension remains very high, when death and comedy, violence and derision, anxiety and its resolution are present at the same time because of inner and simultaneous contradictions or because of a constant shifting between them, one has the very distinct pleasure of the grotesque . . . The pleasure of the spectator, then, is the result of a sometimes painful tension. (136)

The fascination many have for Pinter's plays lies largely in this "painful tension" which is experienced in varying degrees by spectators of all subtextual tragicomedy.

These changes in the aesthetic coding relocate or create a new locus of conflict within the spectators. Moreover, they place a greater burden on spectators. Instead of providing us with characters who are clearly recognizable representatives of virtues and vices, the subtextual playwright forces us to consider the complexity of human nature: actions are not always the result of clear moral or immoral motivations. Instead of relying on a traditional structural pattern, subtextual playwrights modify or negate it, forcing us to recognize that human experience is not shaped or guided by any over-riding plan: life is a process of experience. Instead of separating the comic

from the tragic, subtextual playwrights mix or juxtapose the two, forcing us to re-evaluate our responses to people and events: understanding requires both sympathetic identification and detached analysis. Each of the playwrights provides a distinct view of human experience; each requires a recognition of the complexities of that view. Subtextual dramatic coding - linguistic, systemic and aesthetic - forces the audience to see that the surface is superficial, to seek out the underlying complexity and to re-evaluate our own responses to this dichotomy.

THE PLAYS

Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*

The early responses to Ibsen's plays are now legendary for the passion with which his detractors denounced his work. This anger is usually attributed to an offense at his subject matter. In semiotic terms, contemporary audiences and critics reacted to the changes he makes in his ethical coding. However, some of this reaction also springs from the confusion engendered by Ibsen's modifications to other dramatic codes. Ibsen introduces an emphasis on inexplicitness, on indirectness which has grown into the phenomenon we now recognize as subtext. Through that new coding an audience becomes aware of a new layering of conflict characteristic of subtextual plays. Ibsen's subtext is less confusing to audiences today largely because his modifications are much less radical than subsequent playwrights'. But because his technique was so revolutionary, he also maintained many traditional strategies in order to guide his audience through his new terrain. These strategies which seem to make the subtext so obviously plain to us now were necessary to even the most sophisticated of spectators in his day. Despite the relative ease with which we now decode the subtext, this mixture of the old and the new coding causes a psychological

dissonance that persists, even if less intensely, in a disconcerting form today. *Hedda Gabler*, like Ibsen's other plays, still makes us uneasy.

Many of the contemporary reviews of the English productions of Ibsen's plays are memorable for their vituperative attacks on the subject matter. *Hedda Gabler* is no exception. Following its opening at the Vaudeville Theatre on April 20, 1891, an unsigned notice in the *Saturday Review* described the play as a "study of a malicious woman of evil instincts, jealous, treacherous, cold-hearted, and, as it seems to us, wholly out of place on the stage" (*Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* 223). Another unsigned review appearing in *The Times* described the play as a portrait of insanity which is "suggested in [Hedda's] inconsequent actions, in her callous behaviour, in her aimless persecution of all around her, and it is finally proved by her motiveless suicide." This "precludes all discussion of its heroine's actions upon ethical grounds" because "there is no reasoning as to a lunatic's behaviour" (*Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* 218-19). This objection to the play on ethical grounds was in fact an objection to the most obvious of changes Ibsen makes in the conventional dramatic coding - that of the ethical coding. The latter reviewer correctly identified Ibsen's characters as "the reverse of heroic" (219) as heroes were conventionally understood in his day.

After airing these ethical objections, this critic alluded to, without entirely understanding, some of the technical changes Ibsen makes in the dramatic coding:

> every line tells, and there is not an incident that has not some bearing upon the action, immediate or remote. . . . They have the effect of riveting the attention of the house. The spectator can hardly afford to miss a word

> or a gesture on the stage, and he is thus brought into a state of constant - one might almost say painful - suspense. (Ibsen: *The Critical Heritage* 219)

Clement Scott in reviewing *Rosmersholm* also noted this new demand Ibsen places on his audience:

> The old theory of playwriting was to make your story or your study as simple and direct as possible. The hitherto accepted plan of a writer for the stage was to leave no possible shadow of a doubt concerning his characterisation. But Ibsen loves to mystify. He is as enigmatical as the Sphinx. Those who earnestly desire to do him justice and to understand him keep on saying to themselves, 'Granted all these people are egotists, or atheists, or agnostics, or emancipated, or what not, still I can't understand why he does this or she does that.' (*Ibsen: The Critical Heritage* 168)

Scott unwittingly responded to a new emphasis on subtext in Ibsen's work. Martin Esslin observes that Ibsen's elimination of asides (and, I would add, much of the explicit explanation within dialogue as well) confused and upset the audience perhaps as much as the controversial and incendiary subjects of venereal disease or women's rights (*The Field of Drama* 147). Ibsen replaces this traditional explicit characterisation with a more naturalistic indirect characterisation that focuses the audience's attention more onto the characters' words, actions and conflicts. Like the spectators Scott imagines, we can identify Hedda Gabler as an ambitious egoist in conflict with everyone around her. But to understand her more completely, we must look beyond superficial appearances and identify the underlying conflicts which are subtextually encoded in the play.

On the surface Hedda appears cold, spoiled, self-centred, manipulative. She deliberately antagonizes her husband, his family and their friends. Spectators readily perceive these characteristics and conflicts but, as the play progresses, they gradually become aware of another level of conflict, that between Hedda and a predominantly middle-class society. Critics identify the theme of the individual versus society that runs through most of Ibsen's plays, but they fail to specify that much of this conflict is conveyed subtextually. Hedda, for instance, finds herself torn between her natural inclinations and the rigid prescriptions of middle-class mores. These inclinations are decidedly unfeminine by Victorian standards. She is fascinated by the seamier sexual exploits of some of her male friends. She yearns to exert influence in some public capacity. However, so long as she fears public censure, Hedda is unable to participate directly in these pursuits. So she attempts indirect approaches. She experiences sexual depravity vicariously and would similarly satisfy her desire for power by adopting the role of the woman behind the man, but she has chosen an inappropriate husband for such an endeavour. Society expects her to embrace a narrowly defined, very private role of wife and mother, but Hedda resists these. She entertains little if any respect for her husband and, instead of joy, experiences distress at finding herself pregnant, withholding the news from him. The source of her conflicts with her husband, his family and their friends lies in her stifled "masculine" interests and her resistance to an acceptable "feminine" role. Ibsen dramatises this underlying conflict between Hedda and society using new subtextual coding. However, this coding alone would prove too confusing to his uninitiated audience. So

he retains some of the traditional practices or strategies such as explication, repetition and contrast, combining these with the new coding to act as signposts that guide his spectators through new, uncharted, subtextual territory.

For instance, we learn both directly and indirectly that Hedda is dissatisfied with her new middle-class married existence. She tells Brack that she suffers from ennui, but her boredom is also encoded kinesically in her languid pistol target practice and in her fists raised in frustration as she gazes out of the glass door. The permanently removed furniture covers, to which Miss Tesman overtly draws attention, scenically indicate that she has not entirely resigned herself to the limitations of her new middle-class life. In Act Two she tells Brack that she married for convenience rather than for love, but we have already observed in Act One how she moves away from Jorgen each time he approaches her (proxemic coding) and how she changes the subject (relevance maxim) each time he expresses affection or attempts to include her in a more intimate family experience:

> Tesman. My old morning shoes. My slippers - look!
> Hedda. Oh yes. I remember, you often spoke about them while we were away.
> Tesman. Yes, I missed them dreadfully. (*Going up to her.*) Now you shall see them, Hedda.
> Hedda (*going over to the stove*). No, thanks. It really doesn't interest me.
> Tesman (*following her*). Just think, Aunt Rina embroidered them for me in bed, lying ill like that. Oh, you can't imagine how many memories are worked into them!
> Hedda. Not for me, particularly.
> Miss Tesman. Hedda's right about that, Jorgen.
> Tesman. Yes, but I think, now she belongs to the family -

> Hedda (*interrupting*). My dear, we shall never be able to manage with this maid. (273-74)

Here, her movements away from him, even her direct refusals to share in his rather maudlin sentiment fail to impress upon him her uninterest. The insult to Miss Tesman's new hat follows, but we can see that it springs from Hedda's desire to divert Jorgen rather than from any deliberate intention to antagonise. The explicit refusals as well as the proxemic and pragmatic coding act as deictic signs that draw attention to the subtextual tensions between the newlyweds who have married one another for different reasons.

In addition to combining the explicit with the unexplicit, Ibsen combines familiar codes with the new unexplicit codes to direct his audience. For example, Judge Brack calls himself "a trusted friend" and suggests a "triangular relationship," engaging in a familiar code of euphemism we can assume Ibsen's audience would recognize as referring to an illicit affair. This euphemism prefigures the ambiguity (manner maxim) in the ensuing exchange in which Hedda and Brack develop an analogy between a train journey and a marriage:

> Brack. Fortunately the wedding-journey is over now.
> Hedda (*shaking her head*). The journey will go on for a long time yet. I have only come to a stopping-place on the way.
> Brack. Why, then one jumps out and walks about a little, Madam Hedda.
> Hedda. I never jump out.
> Brack. Don't you really?
> Hedda. No. Because there is always someone at hand who -
> Brack (*laughing*). - Who looks when you leap, you mean?
> Hedda. Precisely.
> Brack. Oh come, you know!
> Hedda (*with a gesture of disagreement*). I don't care for that. I

prefer to remain sitting where I am alone with the other person.
Brack. But suppose, now, a third person were to get in and join the other two?
Hedda. Ah well, that's quite a different matter.
Brack. A trusted and sympathetic friend -
Hedda. - Someone who could talk entertainingly about all sorts of interesting things -
Brack. - And nothing learned about him!
Hedda (*with an audible sigh*). Well, that certainly is a relief.
Brack (*hearing the hall door open and glancing towards it*). The triangle is complete.
Hedda (*half aloud*). And so the train goes on. (301)

By "wedding journey" Brack means Hedda's just concluded honeymoon. However, she draws on the ambiguous potential of the phrase to refer to her marriage as a whole. Leaving familiar euphemisms behind, the two create a new ambiguous language for themselves which is nevertheless informed by Brack's previous and more readily decoded references to "a trusted friend" and a "triangular relationship." "Jumping," the audience comes to realize, translates as "having an affair." Those who "look" are the guardians of Victorian respectability. "A third person" joining the compartment would seem, at least to Hedda, to be someone who is allowed a high degree of intimacy without actually initiating an affair. The last two lines with their paralinguistic and kinesic coding imply that an unspoken and somewhat illicit agreement has been reached and that a new stage in Hedda's marriage/journey is beginning. A re-configuration in the relationships of Hedda, Tesman and Brack has been accomplished without a single direct or explicit statement explaining to the audience what has happened. Thus Brack's familiar euphemisms draw attention to,

and inform, the ambiguity of the exchange; that ambiguity itself is a deictic sign alerting the audience to Brack and Hedda's subtextual negotiation.

Hedda's unannounced pregnancy also prompts the usual, familiar euphemistic references. But, in addition to a familiar code, Ibsen combines subtextual coding with repetition to ensure that the audience not only learns of her condition, but also notices her secretiveness and her unusual reaction to any references made to it. Before Hedda has even appeared onstage, Aunt Julle tells the maid that she may be addressing Tesman as something "grander" than doctor soon (265). Ibsen combines euphemism with implicature and various paralinguistic codes when Julle probes her nephew for happy news. She drops her voice, adopts a confidential tone and stresses the euphemism asking, "But look here, Jorgen, haven't you anything ... anything, well, *special* to tell me?" (Ibsen's italics 268). Tesman unwittingly or intentionally draws attention to Hedda's "plumpness" and "filling out" (275, 303). Brack, unaware that she has already conceived, hints that "a serious claim on you, one full of responsibility" might fill the empty boredom of which she complains (306). He refers to motherhood as a "gift," a "calling." Hedda's reaction is incongruous and over-emphatic (relevance maxim). She snaps angrily at Brack: "Be quiet! You'll never see anything of the kind" (396). On another occasion she steers the conversation away from her condition (relevance maxim again) when Aunt Julle alludes to it:

> Miss Tesman. Ah, Rina should not have died at such a moment. Hedda's home ought not to be sad just now.
> Hedda (*changing the subject*). She died very peacefully didn't she, Miss Tesman? (346-47)

Her reaction to Tesman's observations on her expanding girth is one of denial (quality maxim), compounded by an insistence that borders on the over-informative violation of the quality maxim:

> Tesman (*following her*). Yes, but have you noticed how plump she's grown, and how well she is? How much she's filled out on our travels?
> Hedda (*crossing the room*). Oh, be quiet - !
> Miss Tesman (*who has stopped and turned round*). Filled out?
> Tesman. Of course, you can't see it so well, Aunt Julle, now she has that dress on. But I, who have the opportunity of -
> Hedda (*at the glass door, impatiently*). Oh, you haven't any opportunity!
> Tesman. It must be the mountain air, down there in the Tyrol - Hedda (*interrupting curtly*). I am exactly the same as I was when I went away.
> Tesman. Yes, so you keep on saying. But you certainly aren't. Don't you think so too, Aunt Julle? (275)

Hedda's insistence is provoked by Tesman's equal insistence; both draw attention to her pregnancy. Moreover, Tesman overtly focuses the spectator's attention onto the deictic implicative device of over-insistence. Hedda's denial (quality) and her nervous movements toward the glass door as if she wishes to escape (proxemics) are part of a pattern evident in her behaviour each time anyone alludes to pregnancy. The repetition of this behaviour draws attention to Hedda's obvious distress at the prospect of motherhood.

This repetition is also Ibsen's careful preparation leading up to Hedda's announcement, or more accurately her non-announcement, of her condition to Jorgen. The attentive spectator will draw on the previous comments and implicatures when decoding this subtextual exchange:

> Hedda. Oh well, you'd better know, then, that - just at present - (*Breaking off, violently.*) No, you can go and ask Aunt Julle. She'll tell you all about it.
> Tesman. Ah, I rather think I understand, Hedda! . . . (350)

Once again implicature replaces direct statement. In this moment of extreme agitation, Hedda violates the under-informative maxim. Moreover, her reaction to Tesman's joy is once again incongruous and over-emphatic (relevance): "Oh, it'll be the death of me. It'll be the death of me, all this! . . . All this grotesque nonsense . . . " (351). She delivers this "happy" news with clenched fists (kinesics), a gesture that is at once complementary with the distress in her words, but discrepant with what is usually a joyous announcement. Her reactions here are consistent with her reactions each time someone alludes to her having a child, but inconsistent with the audience's expectations of her reaction, thus deictically drawing attention to the conflict between what Hedda feels and what society expects her to feel.

Ibsen also guides his audience through unfamiliar subtextual territory by periodically inserting an explicit explanation which then informs previous and subsequent unexplicit dialogue and action. For instance, Hedda's frustration with the limits society places on her as a woman are conveyed indirectly. She refers obscurely to her slavery to public censure as a lack of courage (manner). She envies Thea's courage in defying society, her independence and her influence. When Thea tells her she has left her husband, Hedda rises and approaches her (proxemics) as if drawn to her, observing, again obscurely (manner) but also curiously admiringly (perhaps relevance?): "And then - your doing it quite openly!" (287). In contrast, Hedda's fear

of scandal prompts her to resort to covert manipulation. While scheming and manipulation are the stock of drama, Ibsen does not allow his characters the degree of full revelation that Shakespeare allows Prince Hal. Instead, he has Hedda fully explain her machinations once, for instance, to Thea after dispatching Jorgen to write a "good, long" letter to Lövborg "at once:"

> Hedda. That's right. Now we've killed two birds with one stone.
> Mrs. Elvsted. How do you mean?
> Hedda. Didn't you realize I wanted to get rid of him?
> Mrs. Elvsted. Yes, to write his letter.
> Hedda. And also so that I could talk to you alone. (282)

This explanation alerts us to future manipulations. In the ensuing conversation, Hedda ingratiates herself with Thea, becoming familiar with her both verbally, using Christian names (tenor), and physically, moving close to her, touching, even kissing her (proxemics). This startling contrast (another signpost comparable to familiar codes, repetition and explanation) to her distant manner with everyone up to this point should arouse suspicion, especially coming on the heels of her confessed manipulation of Jorgen. Later, she uses deceit to manipulate Lövborg into joining the bachelor party (320-21). She attacks his sense of pride, lying about Judge Brack's contemptuous smile (quality) and revealing Thea's fears that Eilert might weaken and fall into old habits in the city (quantity - over-informative as this was supposed to be kept confidential). Her desire to come between Thea and Eilert is symbolically encoded in her seating arrangement (proxemics): she sits between the two of them. Following his departure, she explains to Thea, "I want, for once in my life, to have

power over a human being's fate. . . . Ah, if you could only realize how poor I am. And here are you offered such riches!" (324).

Ibsen uses identity as another means of revealing Hedda's emotions and motivations explicitly. He accompanies the image of Hedda burning Eilert's manuscript with a running explanation of her actions. This explanation relies on Thea and Eilert's earlier metaphoric reference to the manuscript as their child. Hedda declares that she is burning their child as she rips the pages and flings them onto the flames. This near identity between words and gesture ensures that the audience will not miss Hedda's consuming destructive jealousy. Compare this with another such kinesic moment in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* in which McCann mysteriously tears strips of newspaper. This image embodies a deliberately mindless destruction, a mindlessness that enables McCann to perform his job. Unlike Ibsen, Pinter provides no explanatory commentary, leaving the audience to decode the symbolism. Ibsen's use of explicit explanation alerts us to, and informs, the manipulative activities through which Hedda attempts to exert the kind of influence and power society denies her as a woman.

Ibsen's strategic use of familiar strategies (explanation repetition and contrast) in combination with new linguistic and systemic coding guides the audience to the underlying conflict between the expectations of society and Hedda's desires. Ibsen similarly combines the familiar with the new in his aesthetic coding. He maintains the traditional Aristotelian tragic structure with its conventional pattern of exposition, initiating incident, rising action, climax and denouement. His heroine suffers the

consequences of her misguided efforts to influence someone's life according to her own romantic notions of beauty. Thus Ibsen retains the structural and generic codes of tragedy. However, he tampers with its ethical codes by introducing a heroine who, though she more or less fulfils the requirements of high birth and certainly of hubris, does not behave as heroines, particularly Victorian heroines, are wont to do. Uninterested in the traditional feminine preoccupations of love, marriage and family, she yearns to engage in the traditional masculine pursuits of power and influence. Caught in a marriage of convenience, she resists intimacy and denies the impending arrival of a baby. Ultimately, she commits suicide, killing not only herself but also her unborn child. Contemporary critics of the play found this aversion to marriage and motherhood unnatural and inconceivable. This new anti-stereotypical coding forced them to consider a woman as an individual rather than simply as a member of one half of the human race who all share the same feelings toward marriage and especially motherhood.

Mixing the familiar with the unfamiliar, Ibsen fosters a third level of conflict, that within the spectators themselves, a phenomenon I refer to as psychological dissonance. Though the familiar elements may guide us through the unfamiliar, their juxtaposition simultaneously stirs in us an uneasiness. By relying on a traditional tragic structure, Ibsen establishes an expectation within us for conventional tragic characterization. However, using the new ethical coding, the playwright thwarts these expectations. Returning to Clement Scott's observation about the difficulty of pinning down Ibsen's characters, we find that when our initial and superficial assessment of

Hedda is undermined by a slowly dawning realization that she is as much victim as villain, we again experience an unaccustomed uneasiness. We find that we cannot neatly categorize her. Moreover, she challenges our assumptions about women, marriage and motherhood. Even today, we find we cannot always easily reconcile this conflict between the traditional role of women dictated by biology and economics and the desire of some women to reject this role in favour of venturing into traditionally masculine spheres of power and influence. Certainly, Hedda's decision to kill herself and her child, rather than submit to Brack, still retains its power to disconcert. Ibsen provokes this conflict within us but denies us any satisfactory solution.

Thus we have three layers of conflict. Hedda in her ambitious egoism conflicts with everyone around her. Gradually through the deictic and symbolic linguistic and systemic signs we come to realise that these superficial conflicts arise from an underlying conflict between Hedda and the expectations of society. We see that the superficial villain cloaks the hidden victim. This complex characterization is not new in itself. However, its indirect presentation in conjunction with controversial issues is new. Ibsen rejects the heretofore implicit contract between author and audience to explore clear moral issues in order to reach a consensus. He replaces this affirmation of our beliefs with a challenge that either affronts our convictions or preys on our uncertainties. Ibsen's contemporary spectators were uneasy about the inexplicitness of his new technique as well as his controversial subjects. But I suspect

that what they were most uneasy about, and what most troubles us today, was their response to the irreconcilability of the issues.

Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

Twenty years after the opening of *Hedda Gabler* in London, the Incorporated Stage Society first produced *The Cherry Orchard* at the Aldwych Theatre on May 29, 1911. At least one critic noted the similarity between the audience's somewhat hostile reaction to the Russian's play and the reception accorded to the Norwegian's two decades earlier. Again the critics attacked the play for faults which were actually intentional modifications in the ethical, structural and generic coding. Like Ibsen, Chekhov capitalizes on the subtextual potential of the linguistic and systemic codes, with particular innovations in the paralinguistic coding of hesitations and pauses. He also uses the other coding in much the same deictic and symbolic fashion as Ibsen did before him. Like Ibsen he mixes explicit explanation with indirect communication to aid his audience in its new decoding task. He also employs repetition to build up to a particularly unexplicit subtextual scene such as the one in which Lopakhin fails to propose. And as with Ibsen's plays, this new linguistic, systemic and aesthetic coding creates layers of conflict that ultimately find their way into the response of the spectator himself.

On the occasion of the first London production of *The Cherry Orchard*, Arnold Bennett, under the pseudonym 'Jacob Tonson,' observed:

> The reception of 'The Cherry Orchard' was something like what the reception of Ibsen's plays used to be twenty

> years ago. It was scarcely even a mixed reception. There could be no mistake about the failure of the play to please that vast majority of the members of the [Incorporated Stage] Society. At the end of the second act signs of disapproval were very manifest indeed, and the exodus from the theatre began. A competent authority informed me that at the end of the third act half the audience had departed; but in the narrative fever of the moment the competent authority may have slightly exaggerated. Certain it is that multitudes preferred Aldwych and the restaurant-concerts, or even their own homes, to Chekhov's play. (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 98-99).

One of the primary complaints in the reviews of the day centred on a perceived "foreignness" of the characters and their behaviour. An unsigned notice in the *Morning Post* lamented, "The trouble is that [the play] deals with Russian types, Russian conditions, and Russian ideals, and though all three are to be matched more or less in this country the resemblance is not sufficiently exact to produce the impression of life" (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 94). *The Times* critic expressed frustration with characters who "all seem children who have never grown up" (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 92). Noting the "very chilly welcome from the members of the Stage Society," the anonymous critic in the *Daily Telegraph* expressed sympathy with the audience's "impatience," declaring that, after all,

> to be plunged, without any preparation whatsoever into an atmosphere, a social life, a set of characters, so different from that which we habitually meet, was, and must be, a shock to a well-regulated and conventional English mind. . . . In the 'Cherry Orchard' we see a group of people, exceedingly improvident, more than a little indolent, and occupied in fantastic trivialities, to the entire exclusion of serious objects. (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 93)

This objection to the characterization as "foreign" was, however, a mistaken response to the modifications Chekhov makes to the ethical coding. The foreignness was not so much a result of the Russian qualities the characters exhibit, as it is of a new approach to rendering character on stage.

This new approach is an experiment in naturalism. Chekhov expresses a desire to

> 'show life and men as they are, and not as they would look if you put them on stilts.' 'Let the things that happen on the stage be as complex and yet just as simple as they are in life. For instance, people are having a meal at the table, just having a meal, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being smashed up.' ("Introduction" *Anton Chekhov: Plays* 19)

Bennett remarks that,

> [the play's] naturalism is positively daring. The author never hesitates to make his personages as ridiculous as in life they would be. . . . The consequence is that he is accused of untruth and exaggeration . . . His truthfulness frightens, and causes resentment. (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 99)

Examining characters who at the time appeared to act as naturally as they, with foibles -despite their foreignness - too closely resembling their own seems to have unnerved spectators as much as, if not more than, any tragic hero.

Yet as unsettling as this undoubtedly was, Chekhov's abandonment of conventional characterization has a more profoundly disconcerting result. For he replaces it with an objectivity which denies the spectator not only the luxury of simple approval or disapproval concerning the characters but also the conventional complicity

the audience usually shares with the playwright in this evaluation. In the introduction to one of the earliest translations of *The Cherry Orchard*, George Calderon praises Chekhov for having been "most scrupulously fair in sharing out the virtues and vices evenly to all his characters alike." He declares that,

> Having no villains, it goes without saying that Chekhov has no heroes. His drama is not a drama of conflicting wills. He does not invite you to stake your sympathies on this side or on that. All his characters are ranged together against the common enemy, Life, whether they are drawn up in two battalions or in one. (quoted in *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 103)

While Calderon is correct in claiming there are no clear heroes or villains, he misses the mark in claiming this results from an absence of conflicting wills. Chekhov's characters' beliefs, feelings, desires and motives do conflict. Lopakhin wants Liubov to develop her estate into a summer resort. Liubov and Varia want Lopakhin to propose. Varia despairs at her mother's inability to manage money. Yepihodov is in love with Dooniasha who is enamoured with Yasha who thinks only of himself. These are, in fact, just a few of the myriad of conflicts underlying the superficial one - that of the threat of losing the ancestral estate, and how to save it. Chekhov, therefore, does not eliminate conflict; rather he discourages us from sympathizing with just one or two characters by maintaining a more objective view of all of them which encourages us to feel sympathy with nearly all of them. No one character's views dominate the play or are held up as exemplary. A spectator, accustomed to the reassuring moral centre of a heroine or hero, naturally would experience some sense of dislocation.

Another common accusation levelled at the play focuses on its structure. An unsigned notice in the *Morning Post* objected that "there is little or no story in the piece" (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 94). The critic for the *Daily Telegraph* complained that this play "like most of [Chekhov's] others, is quite formless, and wanting in dramatic movement" (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 93). What this critic despaired of as "formless" is instead a radical reformulation of the structural code. In his study, *Romantic Quest and Modern Query*, Tom Driver asserts that Chekhov revolutionized modern drama by modifying the traditional Aristotelian tragic pattern. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's and Francis Fergusson's interpretations of *The Poetics*, Driver discusses Chekhov's structure in terms of a tragic rhythm which underpins the dramatic action. There are three movements in this rhythm - purpose, passion and perception:

> The tragic hero initiates the tragic action by attempting to fulfil a certain purpose. His behavior is intentional and is directed toward a goal that he takes to be achievable
> . . .
> The hero's purposeful action does not, however, lead directly to the intended conclusion. Instead, it leads to the second phase of the tragic action, which is a suffering (a passion, in the root meaning of that word)
> . . .
> The second phase of the action, the endurance of suffering, leads finally to the third phase, which is the achievement of perception. Out of the suffering, partly because of the nature of impassioned experience and partly owing to the arrangement of the plot, there comes a deeper knowledge of reality than was at first possessed. This perception, which Aristotle thought was most dramatically achieved in a scene of "recognition," constitutes the moral and spiritual fulfilment of the tragic pattern. (Driver 219)

Each of these equally balanced movements leads into and/or grows out of the previous one. Chekhov's innovation is to emphasize the middle movement, the passion, while diminishing the importance of the other two. The charges that Chekhov's characters fail to do anything are unfounded: they still act, but with a less defined purpose. "What they initiate they do not complete . . . what they experience is the result not of action carried out but of action begun and left unfinished. They prefer to experience their experience rather than simply to see it as part of a pattern" (Driver 224). Moreover, if they acquire any insight, any perception about, or as a result of, that experience, it is usually limited. However, the audience is conscious of larger implications and of the characters' failure to perceive them. Focusing on the passion at the expense of purposeful action and perception in this way slows down the action, thus serving Chekhov's purpose to examine the minutiae of everyday living, of both the inner and outer lives of his characters.

The early reviewers were also sensitive to the changes Chekhov makes to the generic coding. The notice in *The Times* lamented that, "genuine comedy and scenes of pure pathos are mixed with knock-about farce" (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 92). On the other hand, H. W. Massingham, the editor of the *Nation*, celebrated the play as a "weeping comedy," claiming that

> this, of course, is the key of the play, which is thus a comedy and a farce and a tragedy in the sense in which life is all these things, being made up of change and loss, and a certain sparkling recovery, and a grimly ludicrous, ironic, riotous play of unknown forces over it all. (*Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* 96)

Blending genres allows for a more naturalistic mimesis of experience, something for which Chekhov certainly strived. However, it accomplishes more than this. Comic moments often follow hard upon potentially tragic exchanges. For instance, Chekhov stirs apprehension in his audience with the following exchange between Liubov and Trofimov, only to undercut it with the farcical:

> Liubov Andryeevna. 'I'm above love!' You're not above love, you're daft, as our Feers would say. Not to have a mistress at your age! ...
> Trofimov (*horrified*). This is dreadful! What's she saying? (*Walks quickly towards the ballroom, his head between his hands.*) This is dreadful. ... I can't, I'm going. ... (*Goes out, but returns at once.*) Everything's finished between us! (*Goes out through the door into the hall.*)
> Liubov Andryeevna (*calls after him*). Pyetia, wait! You funny fellow, I was joking! Pyetia!
>
> *From the hall comes the sound of someone running quickly upstairs, then falling down with a crash. There are shrieks from* Ania *and* Varia, *followed by laughter.*
>
> What's happened?
>
> Ania *runs in.*
>
> Ania (*laughing*). Pyetia's fallen downstairs. (*Runs out.*) (377)

When Trofimov returns, he accepts Liubov's invitation to dance, thus diffusing any anger or resentment, but without resolving their differences of opinion. The argument highlights the differences between Liubov's romantic, but painful, dependency on her abusive lover and Trofimov's romantic idealism, which avoids the pain of real experience, and focuses our attention on the weaknesses of each. Just as he engages our sympathies, however, Chekhov reveals the ridiculousness of his

characters' feelings and behaviour. Thus, tragi-comedy complicates our responses to the characters and action, simultaneously encouraging empathetic identification and critical distance.

If all of these changes in the aesthetic coding are not enough for the audience to absorb, Chekhov also experiments with linguistic and systemic codes. This new coding draws attention to the underlying conflicts which constitute the play's subtext. The ostensible conflict is outlined early in Act One when Ania and Varia find a few moments alone:

> Ania. Well, how are things going? Have we paid the interest?
> Varia. Far from it.
> Ania. Oh dear! Oh dear!
> Varia. The estate will be up for sale in August. (338)

Yet, despite the characters' preoccupation with this crisis, we gather that beneath this threat of losing the ancestral home, the attempt to save it and the failure to do so, lie several other conflicts. The present crisis is the result of various economic and social changes set in motion by the emancipation of the serfs by Czar Alexander II in 1861. The economic impact of the emancipation has undercut the Russian landed gentry's ability to sustain its way of life. Having dissipated their fortunes, Liubov and Gayev are now forced to face the full implications of that impact. Moreover, they and the rest of the characters must also deal with the social changes resulting from the emancipation. As some characters' fortunes worsen, others' improve. While some resist change, others embrace it. These attitudes cut across social lines. For instance, Liubov, Gayev and Feers share a romantic nostalgia for the past. Varia,

Lopakhin, Yasha and Dooniasha either benefit or desire to benefit from a new social mobility. Ania and Trofimov see the old and even the present order as corrupt and so nurture an idealistic vision of the future. The irreconcilability of these three views is the subtextual thread running beneath the surface of the play's action.

Much of the time Chekhov engenders a growing awareness of this conflict indirectly through modified codes. For instance, Feers reminisces about the old days, equating (and thus toying with semantics) freedom with misfortune (365-6). Lopakhin undercuts this rosy recollection with a sarcastic counter-litotes, "Oh, yes, it was a good life all right! At least people got flogged!" (362). He also attacks Trofimov's abstract idealism, taunting him with another counter-litotes: "Oh, awfully clever" (363). Yasha and Dooniasha adopt tenors uncharacteristic of servants. The former disrespectfully tells Gayev, "I can never hear you talk without laughing" (358). The latter mimics the sensibilities of her mistress: "My hands are trembling. I feel as if I'm going to faint" (334). Yasha smokes a cigar, plays billiards and drinks champagne (kinesics). This social blurring is proxemically represented at the dance. Feers notes that post office clerks and station masters have replaced generals, barons and admirals as guests (378). The servants dance and play billiards. The music suggests celebration which for some like Ania, Trofimov and Lopakhin is appropriate. But for Liubov, the levity represents one last nod to her past in this house even as it aggravates her anxiety about her future. Chekhov uses music symbolically at other times in the play as well. A shepherd's pipe in the first act suggests an earlier,

idealistic world. There is also the sound of a snapping string (presumably that of a harp):

> *They all sit deep in thought; the silence is only broken by the subdued muttering of* Feers. *Suddenly a distant sound is heard, coming as if out of the sky, like the sound of a string snapping, slowly and sadly dying away.*
>
> Liubov Andryeevna. What was that?
> Lopakhin. I don't know. Somewhere a long way off a lift cable in one of the mines must have broken. But it must be somewhere very far away.
> Gayev. Or perhaps it was some bird ... a heron, perhaps.
> Trofimov. Or an owl. ...
> Liubov Andryeevna (*shudders*). It sounded unpleasant, somehow. ...
>
> *A pause.*
>
> Feers. It was the same before the misfortune: the owl hooted and the samovar kept singing. (365)

Liubov's shudder (kinesics), Feers' odd observation (relevance) and the repetition of the sound at the end of the play combine to suggest that this dying sound is symbolic of the passing away of a particular age or society.

Chekhov relies on his spectator to piece the unexplicit hints and clues together. Like Ibsen, he occasionally provides explicit dialogue which combines with less direct information to prepare the audience for a scene in which what the characters think and feel will remain unspoken. For instance, he leads up to Lopakhin's non-proposal in much the same manner in which Ibsen leads up to Hedda's non-announcement. However, while Ibsen relies on the familiar contemporary euphemisms for pregnancy

to inform his audience, Chekhov provides his with some explicit dialogue early in the play:

> Ania (*her arms round* Varia, *dropping her voice*). Varia, has he proposed to you?
>
> Varia *shakes her head.*
>
> But he loves you. ... Why don't you talk it over with him, what are you waiting for?
>
> Varia. I don't believe anything will come of it. He's too busy, he's no time to think of me. ... He takes no notice of me at all. I'd rather he didn't come, it makes me miserable to see him. Everyone's talking of our wedding, everyone's congratulating me, but in fact there's nothing in it, it's all a kind of dream. (*In a changed tone of voice.*) You've got a new brooch, a bee, isn't it? (338-39)

Though Varia is right to expect that nothing will come of everyone's expectations, her conjecture that Lopakhin is too busy, too concerned with money is incorrect. Implicatures elsewhere in the play prepare us not only for what many characters hope or expect will transpire - the proposal - but also for Lopakhin's failure to make it. Every character, excluding the servants, openly discusses this expected union: Varia and Lopakhin themselves, Ania, Gayev, Liubov, Trofimov, even Simeonov-Pishchik. Lopakhin's reaction each time the subject is broached in his presence, however, betrays his reluctance to commit to the union. His less-than-enthusiastic praise for Varia (quality) is one such weak attempt to hide this:

> Liubov Andryeevna. You ought to get married, my friend. Lopakhin. Yes. ... That's true.
>
> Liubov Andryeevna. You ought to marry our Varia. She's a nice girl.
>
> Lopakhin. Yes.

> Liubov Andryeevna. She comes from the common folk, and she's a hard-working girl: she can work the whole day without stopping. But the main thing is that she loves you, and you've been attracted by her for a long time yourself.
> Lopakhin. Well. ... I'm quite willing. ... She's a nice girl.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Gayev. I've been offered a job at the bank. Six thousand a year. Have you heard? (361)

Lopakhin's hesitations and limp praise, merely echoing Liubov, are absorbed by the characters and the audience alike during the pause. Gayev's abrupt subject change signals the uncomfortable, mutual recognition of Lopakhin's reluctance. When Liubov later announces to Varia that they have "almost fixed up your marriage," Varia's distress at the casualness of this remark in turn prompts Lopakhin's nervously bizarre misquotation (relevance and manner): "Go to a nunnery, Ohmelia!" (367). Whether he is conscious of it or not, Lopakhin's rhapsody (quantity and manner) on the younger Liubov who once tended his wounds many, many years before suggests he really loves the mother rather than the daughter (333-34). As the spectators gather their impressions of these and other references to the hoped-for marriage, they realize that not only is Lopakhin unable to tell Liubov he really loves her, he cannot even bring himself to tell her that he does not wish to marry her daughter.

When the anticipated moment finally arrives in the fourth act, Lopakhin's non-proposal, like Hedda's non-announcement, is conveyed indirectly through subtextual pragmatic and paralinguistic coding. After agreeing with Lopakhin that he should propose, Liubov sends in her daughter, who pretends to search for something:

Varia. It's strange, I can't find ...
Lopakhin. What are you looking for?
Varia. I packed the things myself, yet I can't remember...

A pause.

Lopakhin. Where are you going to now, Varvara Mihailovna?
Varia. I? To the Rogulins. I've agreed to go look after the house for them. . . to be their housekeeper, or something.
Lopakhin. That's at Yashnevo, isn't it? About seventy miles from here. (*A pause.*) So this is the end of life in this house. ...
Varia (*examining the luggage*). But where could it be. Or perhaps I packed it in the trunk? ... Yes, life in this house has come to an end ... there won't be anymore. ...
Lopakhin. And I'm going to Kharkov presently. ... On the next train. I've got a lot to do there. And I'm leaving Yepihodov here. ... I've engaged him.
Varia. Well! ...
Lopakhin. Do you remember, last year at about this time it was snowing already, but now it's quite still and sunny. It's rather cold, though. ... About three degrees of frost.
Varia. I haven't looked. (*A pause.*) Besides, our thermometer's broken. (*A pause.*)

A voice is heard from outside the door: 'Yermolay Alexayevitch!')

Lopakhin (*as if he had long been expecting it*). Coming this moment! (*Goes out quickly.*) (395)

This scene illustrates the delicate interaction between the hesitations and pauses (paralinguistics) and the conversational implicatures (pragmatics). The hesitations and pauses allow the meaning of the implicatures to rise to the surface, enabling the audience to grasp their nuances. Varia enters under the pretext of searching for

something but avoids specifying what that something is (quantity and quality). The first pause underlines the collective awareness (both of the characters and the audience) that Lopakhin is supposed to be proposing and that Varia is waiting for him to do so. Instead, Lopakhin resorts to small talk which is not irrelevant to the larger context of packing up and leaving the house, but which is irrelevant to the immediate context in which he is expected to propose (relevance). During the second pause following his observation on the distance soon to separate them, various thoughts spring to mind: the difficulty for Lopakhin to see Varia should he allow her to leave now; the probability that this is his last chance to propose; the convenience of not having to face her again should he fail to do so. Again, instead of exploiting this opportunity, instead of passionately declaring his refusal to let her go, he persists in discussing the larger context of their collective dispersal, of his plans and arrangements (quantity). Finally, when he resorts to discussing the weather (relevance), the pauses in Varia's answer heighten our sense of her despair and helplessness. The hesitations punctuating this exchange lend it a self-conscious awkwardness. Varia's purposeless (other than providing Lopakhin his opportunity) rummaging among the boxes and trunks (kinesics) reflects the wandering fruitlessness of their conversation and underlines their inability to connect with one another.

Chekhov's use of implicatures does not indicate a simple inability on the part of the characters to express themselves or a simple lack of communication. He does allow each character at least one opportunity to state explicitly her/his view. This provides a series of conceptions of the old life, the new reality and the idealistic

visions for the future which informs the abounding implicatures. Indeed, an implicature follows each explicit statement, suggesting an utter inability (that goes beyond a simple miscommunication) to grasp each other's views. For example, when Lopakhin implores Liubov to give him a straight answer, she changes the subject (relevance):

> Lopakhin. We must decide once and for all; time won't wait. After all, my question's quite a simple one. Do you consent to lease your land for villas, or don't you? You can answer in one word: yes or no? Just one word!
> Liubov Andryeevna. Who's been smoking such abominable cigars here? (*Sits down.*)
> Gayev. How very convenient it is having a railway here.
>
> (*Sits down.*) . . .
>
> Lopakhin. Just one word! (*Beseechingly.*) Do give me an answer.
> Gayev (*yawns*). What do you say?
> Liubov Andryeevna (*looking into her purse*). Yesterday I had a lot of money, but today there's hardly any left. (357)

The frustration revealed in Lopakhin's "beseeching" tone (paralinguistics) and in his repetition of "one word" (syntax) seems, on the one hand, justified. Liubov and Gayev's avoidance is imparted in both the implicatures, in Liubov's changing focus onto the contents of her purse (kinesics) and in their sitting down (proxemics). The last also conveys a sense of the hopelessness not only of solving their problem but of making Lopakhin understand. Liubov, in her turn, pours her heart out to the uncomprehending student Trofimov:

> Liubov Andryeevna. . . . do consider our position

> carefully, do be generous - even if only a little bit - and spare me. I was born here, you know, my father and mother lived here, and my grandfather, too, and I love this house - I can't conceive life without the cherry orchard, and if it really has to be sold, then sell me with it. ... (*Embraces* Trofimov, *kisses him on the forehead.*) You know, my son was drowned here. ... (*Weeps.*) Have pity on me, my dear, dear friend.
>
> Trofimov. You know that I sympathize with you with all my heart.
>
> Liubov Andryeevna. But you must say it differently ... differently. (375-76)

The ambiguity of Liubov's last remark is a transgression of the manner maxim which also functions deictically, drawing our attention to the importance of how a character says something. Trofimov offers her a cliché bereft of emotional substance. Liubov recognizes his inability to understand her point of view even as he misses the significance of her implicature. Attentive spectators, on the other hand, will understand its significance and the significance of his missing it. They will also compare Liubov's view with the others explicitly expressed elsewhere by Trofimov, Lopakhin, Varia etc., as part of a process of reconstructing a picture of this metamorphosing society. Finally, in proxemic terms this ideological or metaphysical distance between the characters as well as "the hidden tensions among them is made palpably visible" in the way Chekhov groups the characters "in clusters of twos and threes on a wide stage" (Esslin The Field of *Drama* 68).

Unlike Chekhov's characters, the spectators enjoy a knowledge of everyone's point of view. However, as mentioned earlier, the playwright denies them a moral centre and/or a focus of sympathy or identification. Each character's view has its

strengths and weaknesses. For instance, as much as we cringe at Lopakhin's insensitivity, we recognize the practicality of his plan and share his frustration with Liubov's irresolute inaction. This lack of a moral centre, of a sympathetic heroine/hero, is partially responsible for the third level of conflict, that within the spectator. Additionally, Chekhov introduces a familiar conventional conflict - the threat to the estate - that encourages the expectation that someone will undertake some form of decisive action, effective or otherwise. Hedda, for instance, still acts with conventional decisiveness even if her actions themselves are unconventional. But as in *Hedda Gabler* there is an increasing awareness, gathered through the linguistic and systemic coding, of an underlying conflict: in this case, the irreconcilability of the situation, of the characters' views and those of the audience, to any one of those views. The mixing of genres further complicates the spectators' response. Just as the pathos draws them into empathetic identification, the farcical forces them back into critical objectivity. Chekhov confronts his audience with far more than a few minor changes in the linguistic, systemic or aesthetic coding. Like Ibsen he provides enough of the conventional strategies of explicit explanation, repetition and contrast to lead his audience through this unfamiliar territory. His modifications to the aesthetic coding are much more profound than Ibsen's. The combination of two familiar genres into an unfamiliar mix, of familiar conflict with unfamiliar indecisive action, of simultaneously sympathetic and exasperating characters none of whom function as a guiding moral centre, unsettle an audience who are, perhaps, no longer easily disturbed by controversial subjects alone.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

Early playwrights using subtext - from Ibsen, Strindberg (*Miss Julie*, *The Stronger*), and Chekhov to Jean-Jacques Bernard and O'Neill (*Long Day's Journey Into Night*) - aim for a naturalistic rendering of unspoken thoughts, feelings and motivations without resorting to such artificial conventions as the aside or the soliloquy. These playwrights are also preoccupied with the often faulty communication between characters and the complexity of underlying relationships. At the half-way point of the twentieth century, Beckett moves away from a concern with naturalism, using subtext in the context of absurdism instead. He becomes less interested in showing how characters fail to understand one another's meaning than in communicating to us how this and other traditional sources of meaning are no longer as important as they once seemed. Thus his aesthetic, linguistic and systemic coding, as well as the traditional literary strategies such as explanation and repetition which previous playwrights use to guide the spectator to the subtext, are radically redefined in order to transform the audience's interpretive process.

Early audiences of *Waiting for Godot* exhibited the same consternation and bewilderment that characterized the reception of early performances of Ibsen and Chekhov. One critic recounted the audience's reaction at the Criterion Theatre in London:

> When the second-act curtain rose, at least 20 per cent of the audience had walked out. A few remained behind to heckle the players. Most of those who remained were disturbed, excited or absorbed by this strange, seemingly incomprehensible play. (Levy 33)

Many of the first reviews and much of the early criticism of Beckett's first play centred on a search for meaning. A review of the first London production in 1956 in the *Time's Literary Supplement* interpreted the play in Christian terms. This sparked a flurry of letters endorsing or rejecting this reading. The editor summed up the replies, providing an overview of the variety of contemporary responses this play elicited:

> Two extreme views, not represented in the letters we have published, are worth recording. One is that the play is a hoax on highbrows, and that our reviewer, who found a deep Christian meaning in it, was either Mr. Beckett's ally or his dupe; the other is that the deep meaning of the play was so extremely deep that it was very wrong and presumptuous of our reviewer to attempt its exposition; the meaning was inexpressible and therefore ought not to have been expressed. Between these extremes, most of the letters we have received have been concerned with the validity of a Christian interpretation of the play. Here again there have been several extreme approaches. Mr. Empson, in his typically lively way, seems to agree that a Christian interpretation is a correct one; adding that this shows what a dangerous thing Christianity can be, . . . Yet for another correspondent the play though Christian in its imagery, was not the least Christian in its theme. It was rather an atheist-existentialist play, insisting on the impossibility of the individual's shifting his burdens to any pair of shoulders other than his own: its moral was, "If this is where waiting for Godot gets us, why wait for Godot?" ("Puzzling About Godot" 221)

We inevitably wonder why this play provoked such wildly disparate interpretations. Had Beckett deliberately fostered this confusion, and how? The answer to the first of these questions is "yes"; the answer to the second is decidedly more complex. Beckett encourages uncertainty in his audience by consistently undermining the fundamentals of dramatic representation, the conventions of structure, language and action. For instance, he takes Chekhov's metamorphosis of the Aristotelian structure to its limit, almost entirely dismantling any notions of beginning, middle and end. He also continues the experiment with tragi-comedy, playing the conventional responses to one genre against those of the other. He uses his systemic codes ironically so that they undercut themselves, revealing and questioning traditional dramatic assumptions. His linguistic codes, too, ironically undercut the traditional dramatic functions of language, focusing instead on another function which has always been present in everyday interaction, but which has been neglected or ignored in most drama and criticism. Not only does this ironic attack on the traditional coding draw our attention to the conventions and their transformation, it also encourages us to examine how we perceive and expect to perceive meaning in a dramatic performance. And in challenging our traditional approach to perceiving meaning in a play, Beckett encourages us to re-evaluate how we perceive meaning in our everyday lives.

We often discover meaning in drama (and literature in general) through tracing traditional patterning. When Chekhov began to tinker with the familiar Aristotelian structure, he set in motion a process that would find its apotheosis in Beckett. The latter so radically undermines the traditional structure as to utterly confuse the

uninitiated spectator. After the first performance of *En Attendant Godot* in Paris, Jean Anouilh, quoting from the play, reportedly exclaimed, "Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (Frazer 84, Levy 33). However, he goes on to qualify, "But I think the evening at the Babylone is as important as the premiere of Pirandello, put on in Paris by Pitoeff in 1923" (Fraser 84). Beckett focuses so exclusively on the passion or suffering of his characters (the middle movement in the tragic rhythm), that purposeful action and perception on the part of the characters virtually cease to exist. In an early analysis of the play, Eric Bentley observes:

> Like many modern plays, *Waiting for Godot* is undramatic but highly theatrical. Essential to drama, surely, is not merely situation but situation in movement, even in beautifully shaped movement. A *curve* is the most natural symbol for a dramatic action, while, as Aristotle said, beginning, middle, and end are three of its necessary features. Deliberately anti-dramatic, Beckett's play has a shape of a non-dramatic sort; two strips of action are laid side by side like railway tracks. These strips are One Day and the Following Day in the lives of a couple of bums. (20-21)

Bentley reflects the audience's desire for traditional structure, a desire Beckett deliberately frustrates. First, he thwarts the audience's expectation for exposition. In its place, his characters offer rather vague and incomplete explanations: for an unknown reason they are waiting for Godot, someone they may not recognize if he actually comes, in a place which may or may not be where he is coming and in which they may or may not have passed much time already waiting, on what may or may not be the appointed day. The two offer no explanation as to who they are or how or why they have arrived at this juncture. The closest this play and these characters

come to an initiating incident or purposeful action is to wait, to fill in the time idly waiting. The climax is instead an anti-climax for Godot does not arrive. The two tramps remain unclear about their predicament or their purpose, defying any hope of perception. That they will continue to wait resists any notions of resolution and traditional conceptions of Aristotle's principle of completeness. Since Bentley's review, critics have reached a general consensus that the play's structure resembles a circle rather than a curve, pyramid or railway track. This circular structure suggests a new way of viewing events, of seeing life as a repetitive cycle. The circular, repetitive action thus redefines our sense of completeness. It frustrates our expectations of cause and effect, refocusing our attention on the quality of the characters' experience itself.

This focus on the passion or the suffering of the characters undermines our traditional impulse to evaluate, to judge either sympathetically or critically, any individual character's motives, feelings or actions. Instead, Beckett encourages a simple identification, an empathy with his characters. This, in turn, redirects the audience's critical attention, its desire to find meaning in the characters' situation or predicament. Moreover, as in Chekhov, there are no villains or heroes. In their place Beckett presents two music-hall clowns. He purposely encourages spectators to make the connection between his characters and the kind of Chaplinesque figure so familiar to them. Certainly these two tramps resemble such Vaudevillian buffoons both in dress and in the physical comedy in which they engage. However, he then subverts our expectations of these characters by endowing them with an unexpected

intellectual propensity for contemplative, philosophical questioning. Pozzo and Lucky also resist traditional ethical decoding. Pozzo, the seeming villain, reappears a pathetic figure in the second act. Lucky, the seemingly oppressed, resists any improvement in his plight and repays Estragon's kindness with a vicious attack. Again, this unfamiliar coding simultaneously arouses our natural tendency to search for meanings - such as the master-slave relationship between Pozzo and Lucky - even as it confuses and frustrates that desire. Moreover, we look for some sort of character development, some epiphanic moment from which both characters and spectators derive meaning. The two main characters remain static, however. The minor characters do suffer change but no one onstage, neither they nor the tramps, learns much if anything from his deteriorating condition. Beckett, even more than Chekhov, forces the audience to discover its own perception as opposed to sharing the characters'. Overall, this mix of familiar and unfamiliar ethical coding causes us to withdraw from the characters and reconsider how we derive meaning from an analysis of them.

Just as Beckett follows Chekhov's lead in his structural and ethical coding, he adopts the tragicomic blend in his generic coding. Remembering Hirst's distinction between the two Elizabethan approaches to tragicomedy, we could use these to define the two poles of a tragicomic scale. At one end we would have "a careful synthesis of elements from the contrasted genres" and at the other "a volatile mix of tragedy and comedy" (xi-xii). We would place Chekhov's, Beckett's and Pinter's plays toward the latter end of the scale, each one slightly closer to that volatile mix that stirs up

and sets against one another the contrasting emotional responses to comedy and tragedy. Considered in these terms, Beckett's blend is more disconcerting than Chekhov's because the contrasting comic and tragic elements and our responses to them are more extreme than to those in the Russian's play. In Chekhov, our laughter at the farcical moments tempers our growing uneasiness and dread. Chekhov's balance of sympathetic identification and critical distance is gentler, more tempered than Beckett's. Whereas the former's characters' buffoonery breaks the tension between them and in us, Vladimir and Estragon's farcical behaviour arouses in us a fondness which counters our growing frustration with their impotence and inaction. *The Cherry Orchard*'s ending, though unremitting in its death-knell for Liubov and Gayev's world, simultaneously offers hope and renewal in the emerging world of Lopakhin and in the hoped-for-world of Trofimov and Ania. At the conclusion of Beckett's play, however, hope is more tenuous. We are uncertain not only about whether Godot will come, but also about whether this is important. Denied the catharsis of a tragic ending, denied the hope of a new order of a comedic ending, we look for meaning elsewhere, turning to the unchanging relationship between the two tramps established throughout the play.

This frustrated search for meaning where there is none emerges as the underlying conflict of the play. Superficially, the play appears to be about two tramps waiting for someone who does not come. Gradually, we realize that Vladimir expects more from Godot's arrival than a simple appearance. He expects an epiphanic moment in which all will be explained. The audience shares this

expectation but, unlike Vladimir, learns that Godot's arrival is ultimately inconsequential. What lends dignity and meaning to their waiting, to their existence is not the ultimate arrival of some higher being, but the relationship the two tramps share in the meantime. Just as the aesthetic coding redirects our attention to unconventional sources of meaning, so too do the linguistic and systemic codes. Each ironically undercuts the traditional functions of language, action and scenery in order to undermine the audience's expectations, redirecting its attention toward different sources of meaning. Whereas Ibsen and Chekhov occasionally exploit discrepancy to suggest subtextual meaning, we find Beckett relies heavily on what Roventa-Frumuşani calls parodic discrepancy. We might consider this a renewing absurdist influence on subtextual drama. Certainly it renews the audience's bewilderment just as it was coming to terms with and assimilating the naturalist subtextual techniques and strategies. Like his predecessors, Beckett establishes signposts to guide his audience. He uses explanation and repetition as well as a new strategy of self-referentiality, not in order to build up to or to inform a subtextual moment, but to draw attention to the coding with a view to encouraging the audience to rethink its conventional response. His strategy becomes one of ironic subversion, for he modifies his linguistic and systemic codes in order to undermine their conventional functions and our conventional interpretation of them.

Irony characterizes Beckett's systemic coding. The emptiness of the stage (scenic coding) symbolically reflects the characters' desolation of spirit. In the second act, Beckett teases the audience with a budding tree. This traditional sign of

hope mocks the characters' and the audience's hopes for Godot's arrival, for something to happen, for some sort of resolution. At the end of play, he conversely undercuts their despair using kinesic coding. While preparing to hang themselves, Estragon removes his belt, a piece of cord, only to have his pants fall down. The ridiculousness, the laughter this figure provokes, neutralizes our despair, detaching us from theirs. Elsewhere, Beckett uses both kinesic and proxemic coding to parody any notion of purposeful action. Vladimir fiddles with his hat, Estragon with his boots. These are futile attempts to make each more comfortable, accomplishing nothing. Rovenţa-Frumuşani notes that Beckett's characters "do not adjust their posture and relative distance from one another according to the degree of intimacy, the social roles they are performing or the nature of the interaction. . . . characters keep up a conversation without looking at each other etc. All proxemic indices rely on a parody-distortion" (322). Similarly, one or the other periodically declares that he should leave or that he is leaving, only to remain onstage (proxemics). Each act, for example, ends with the same words:

> Vladimir. Well, shall we go?
> Estragon. Yes, lets go.
>
> *They do not move.*

This is an example of both incompleteness, "the enunciation of an act which fails to trigger the adequate behavior" and "incongruity between doing and saying" (Rovenţa-Frumuşani 323), the two forms of parodic discrepancy found in Beckett's kinesic and proxemic coding.

That this happens not once, but repeatedly throughout the play deepens our impression that Vladimir and Estragon are powerless to control or to change their predicament. Rovenţa-Frumuşani observes how action as well as dialogue breaks Grice's cooperative principle, transgressing the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner, thereby undermining our expectation of overall coherence (323). Furthermore, Pfister sees a fundamental challenge to Aristotelian precepts of action in this discrepancy between words and action (48-49). This challenge to our expectations of conventional action and of a complementary relationship between action and words functions deictically, drawing attention not only to Beckett's modifications to these, but also to the way in which we conventionally deduce meaning from them.

Just as the systemic codes undercut traditional expectations about purpose, action and accomplishment, so too the linguistic coding undercuts the traditional functions of language. Elam notes that dramatic language is more intensely descriptive, informational and interpretive than everyday conversation. Because much of the latter is conducted by people who know one another well, these functions are less necessary and, therefore, less in evidence. In these relationships, language functions more as a kind of phatic communion, a re-confirmation of relationships between conversants rather than a communication of any particular ideas.[19] In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett undercuts the meaning of language, focusing attention on the isolation of these characters and on how language functions merely as a tentative bond between the two. For instance, Gautum and Sharma, in "Dialogue in *Waiting*

for Godot and Grice's Concept of Implicature," propose the following exchange as an illustration of how Vladimir's "sympathetic concern for fellow human beings is rather perfunctory" (582):

> Vladimir. Where was I ... How's your foot?
> Estragon. Swelling visibly.
> Vladimir. Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story? (9)

Breaking the relevance maxim, Vladimir appears more interested in his own musings than in Estragon's suffering. He is less interested in ascertaining his friend's condition than he is in affirming that his auditor is still attending to him, that the communicative link between them remains intact. Beckett's implicatures do not draw attention so much to what characters cannot or will not say, as they do to what the characters do with the language.

Beckett also uses self-reflexive references to draw attention to the phatic function of language. For example, Vladimir makes explicit reference to our expectations of the communicative process. When Estragon remains unresponsive, Vladimir draws our attention to this transgression of the quantity maxim:

> Vladimir. And yet ... (*pause*) ... how is it - this is not boring you I hope - how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there - or thereabouts - and only one speaks of a thief being saved. (*Pause.*) Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?
> Estragon (*with exaggerated enthusiasm*). I find this really most extraordinarily interesting. (9)

Vladimir focuses our attention on our expectation of appropriate responses. The discrepancy between Estragon's tone and words (paralinguistics) highlights a common

reluctance to meet this demand. Later, Vladimir becomes desperate to avoid silences:

Long silence.

Vladimir. Say something!
Estragon. I'm trying.

Long silence.

Vladimir (*in anguish*). Say anything at all!
Estragon. What do we do now?
Vladimir. Wait for Godot.
Estragon. Ah!

Silence.

Vladimir. This is awful! (40-41)

Silence breaks the bond, underlines their separateness. Talking is their relationship; it is an action, an occupation, what they do to pass the time waiting. Estragon makes this explicit with various self-reflexive exclamations, including "That's the idea, let's contradict each other" and "That's the idea, let's ask each other questions" (41). Communication becomes self-conscious action:

Vladimir. I interrupted you.
Estragon. On the contrary.

They glare at each other angrily.

Vladimir. Ceremonious ape!
Estragon. Punctilious pig!
Vladimir. Finish your phrase, I tell you!
Estragon. Finish your own!

Silence. They draw closer, halt.

Vladimir. Moron!
Estragon. That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.

Vladimir. Moron!
Estragon. Vermin! (48)

A series of insults ensues ending with "Crritic!" at which Vladimir wilts and Estragon then suggests making up. This self-conscious running commentary functions deictically, re-focusing our attention from what is said to how it is said. This makes overt what is unacknowledged in many of our everyday interactions - that much communication is merely a way of establishing bonds with one another and getting through time together.

Not only does Beckett use implicature to arouse and disappoint our expectation for language to function conventionally, he also uses syntax and semantics to accomplish these functions. Anaphora (repetition of the first word) figures prominently in numerous exchanges, such as this one:

Vladimir. We could do our exercises.
Estragon. Our movements.
Vladimir. Our elevations.
Estragon. Our relaxations.
Vladimir. Our elongations.
Estragon. Our relaxations.
Vladimir. To warm us up.
Estragon. To calm us down. (49)

Beckett repeats this game using different series of words. The repetition within these exchanges creates a balance and rhythm, a sense of order in form and sound which teases the spectator into expecting some sort of meaning. Vladimir might seem to be attempting to pinpoint meaning by summoning synonyms, but Estragon's insistent repetition of the same word undermines such an enterprise. The antithesis between

warm/calm, up/down underlines the opposition between Vladimir's desire for exercise and Estragon's for relaxation. The repetition and balance of this kind of exchange with varying word sequences might, on the one hand, encourage the audience to seek meaning in them. Ultimately, Beckett's refusal to provide meaning forces the spectator to look at what the two tramps do accomplish with this game: they pass the time, and the rhythm of the passage suggests a harmony in their cooperation and companionship.

Repetition was once a device used by playwrights to draw attention to and guide the spectator through the subtext. Occasional explanations which other characters would miss or misunderstand were also signposts. Just as Beckett plays on our expectations of repetition, so he disappoints those we have for explanation. For instance, Lucky's speech is an example of verbiage (semantics), an "abundance of words without necessity or without much meaning" (*OED*). Yet here again we find it difficult to resist the temptation to tease some sort of meaning from his gibberish (which also happens to violate the manner maxim in its prolixity, disorder, obscurity and ambiguity), to discover some kind of explanation within it:

> Lucky. Given the existence as uttered forth in the public
> works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal
> God quaquaquaqua with white beard
> quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who
> from the heights of divine apathia divine
> athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some
> exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell
> and suffers like the divine Miranda with those
> who for reasons unknown but time will tell are
> plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire
> flames if that continues and who can doubt it will
> fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to

> heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm
> which even though intermittent is better than
> nothing . . . (28)

The biblical references here are part of a semantic pattern running throughout the play. As in this speech, the pressure of traditional meaning associated with the two thieves, the apostles and Christ encourages spectators to try to make connections, to find meanings where there may be none:

> Vladimir. Your boots, what are you doing with your
> boots?
> Estragon (*turning to look at the boots*). I'm leaving
> them there (*Pause.*) Another will come, just as
> ... as ... as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll
> make him happy.
> Vladimir. But you can't go barefoot!
> Estragon. Christ did.
> Vladimir. Christ! What has Christ got to do with it?
> You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!
> Estragon. All my life I've compared myself to him.
> Vladimir. But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!
> Estragon. Yes. And they crucified quick.
>
> *Silence*. (34)

The allusions simply lead back to Vladimir and Estragon - in this case, back to the nature of their existence, that of unending suffering. The semantic patterning encourages the spectator to attempt to make connections with things outside the text, only to bring him back to the essentials of the tramps' companionable co-existence.

The characters' desire for meaning which constitutes the subtext of *Waiting for Godot* reflects our own desire to discover meaning in the text. Yet we find that our impulse to decode the linguistic, systemic and aesthetic codes ironically produces a rather extreme form of psychological dissonance.[20] This third level of conflict, that

within the spectator, occurs here between our desire to find meaning and the lack of conventional meaning in the play. Moreover, we discover that if we attempt to apply our hard- earned skills for decoding the subtext within the realistic or naturalistic context, we will remain equally confused. Beckett abandons the aim of the earlier subtextual playwrights to convey unspoken thoughts, motivations, relationships within the confines of realism or naturalism. The codes that were once used to convey what the characters would not or could not express openly or articulately are now used to question whether communicating conventional meaning is possible or even important. The subtextual linguistic and systemic coding with its implicatures and discrepancies tease us with the possibility of meaning only to disappoint us and redirect our attention to different sources of meaning. The by now familiar devices of explanation and repetition as well as the absurdist strategies of self-referentiality and subversion still function deictically, but they also draw us into an illusion of conventional meaning, only to disappoint us. This constant undermining of the familiar produces that state of psychological dissonance which encourages us to redirect our attention and revise our expectations.

Vladimir and Estragon's expectation that Godot's arrival will somehow illuminate or bring meaning to their lives is undercut by a growing realization that there is no meaning to be found except in their relationship with each other. In rendering this subtext, Beckett's new coding consistently challenges the audience's impulse to search for meaning in conventional forms, thus creating that third level of conflict in the spectator characteristic of subtextual drama. He provides us with

those conventional forms only to whisk them out from under our feet. He transforms the Aristotelian structure almost into its opposite, thwarting expectations of background information, of purposeful action, of a climax, of enlightenment, of redemption and resolution. He emasculates Aristotle's fundamental and paramount principle of action, reducing it to a helpless, ironic parody of its former self. The importance of the traditional descriptive, informational and interpretive functions of dramatic language is diminished in favour of the phatic function more common to everyday conversations. In short, Beckett consistently undermines all of our attempts to find meaning in the familiar traditional dramatic conventions. Consequently we suffer from psychological dissonance to a rather extreme degree. We must either reject the play as incomprehensible, as so many spectators do, or we must restructure our expectations of its dramatic codes.

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

Each successive playwright we examine here makes further modifications to the dramatic coding which initially mystified or even offended contemporary audiences. Pinter is no exception. His plays sometimes met with complaints of offended sensibility reminiscent of contemporary reactions to Ibsen's work. Most of Pinter's plays feature unsavoury characters and bizarre behaviour. However, this does not explain the sheer confusion many feel, especially on first acquainted. Most suspect there is more occurring in the play than they understand, and in this supposition they are often correct. Pinter, like those before him, requires us to reshape our interpretive skills in decoding the linguistic, systemic and aesthetic coding. Like them, he provides some guidance, though this is less overt than that found in the naturalistic subtextual plays and becomes less necessary as audiences acquire familiarity with his style. This familiarity allows them to follow the covert manoeuverings which constitute the subtext of his plays.

Like the reviews of Beckett's plays, those of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* perceived an intention to be confusing and obscure for no apparent reason:

> A highly talented cast under [director] Mr Peter Wood . . . play the piece with an assurance and finesse which convinces us that they and he understand it, and almost persuade us that we should. (Worsley 694)

A number of these early reviewers focused on the themes and issues to which critics would return in years to come. Their frustration at the lack of exposition and the absence of a clear cause-and-effect relationship reveals a recognized that Pinter was doing something different, but without any real understanding that he is challenging their expectations, or of why he does so:

> What all this means only Mr. Pinter knows, for as his characters speak in non sequiturs, half-gibberish and lunatic ravings, they are unable to explain their actions, thoughts or feelings. If the author can forget Beckett, Ionesco and Simpson he may do much better next time. (MMW, *Manchester Guardian* 5)

> This essay in surrealistic drama at the Lyric, Hammersmith, gives the impression of deriving from an Ionesco play which M. Ionesco has not yet written. The first act sounds an off-beat note of madness; in the second the note has risen to a sort of delirium; and the third act studiously refrains from the slightest hint of what the other two may have been about. ("Puzzling Surrealism of *The Birthday Party* 3)

These reviewers turned their frustration back on the playwright by accusing him of arbitrarily abandoning conventional practice either out of fashionable opportunism (imitating Ionesco's absurdism) or out of deliberate but purposeless (beyond a fleeting sensationalism) obfuscation. Many subsequent critics have expended much energy searching for clues in order to piece together explanations of the characters' backgrounds, motivations, actions, but still in traditional terms. They have tried to explicate what has been mistaken as subtext by providing what the playwright has omitted. Pinter's changes to the aesthetic coding, however, are not arbitrary, but an integral component of the subtext. They frustrate the audience's expectations for

conventional structure and character, redirecting its attention and reshaping its responses to the action.

Structurally, Pinter follows Chekhov and Beckett's lead in modifying the traditional Aristotelian structure. After *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett continues to take the anti-Aristotelian structure with its non-existent or almost non-existent exposition, purposeful action, perception and resolution, as far as it can go. Once this point is reached, there is nowhere for subsequent playwrights to go but to retreat somewhat. Pinter makes this retreat in so far as he reintroduces the element of purposeful action, the awareness of action both preceding and following the action of the play itself, and the sense that the action of the play has transformed the characters' situation. Goldberg and McCann deliberately come to the boardinghouse to find and to remove Stanley. They have performed such jobs together before. The two strangers succeed in removing Stanley in order to take him to some mysterious figure named Monty. However, while Pinter certainly provides us with far more information than Beckett, he still denies the audience any exposition which would explain the intentions behind the purposeful action, explain the characters' behaviour before and during the action of the play itself, or explain what perception we should gain or to what sort of resolution the action has arrived. In *The Birthday Party*, we never learn precisely why Stanley is living at the boarding house, why the two strangers are looking for him, or why they undermine his sanity and take him away. As we do not in Beckett, we do feel we could find reasons but the characters (and Pinter) withhold them. This has two consequences beyond initial audience resentment. First, we find ourselves re-

thinking our expectations of such precise exposition. After all, we do not possess such information which would explain the feelings, thoughts and motivations of everyone we meet, even of those we know, even of ourselves. Second, in withholding this information, Pinter forces us to scrutinize the characters' words and actions not simply more attentively in order to learn what these thoughts, feelings and motivations are, but in order to learn how these embody and reveal the characters' relationships. Once we begin to see how language and action are used by characters to define and manipulate their relationships, we may then turn this new critical eye onto our own relationships.

Pinter's ethical coding encourages this transfer as well. Initially, the lower-class characters in their seedy surroundings invite us to anticipate a play in the style of kitchen-sink naturalism popular in London at the time *The Birthday Party* was first produced. This expectation for naturalistic characterization is supported by the complexity of character we have come to expect from naturalism. So while Stanley is repulsive and despicable, he is mainly harmless. While Meg is simple and irritating, she is kindly. While Goldberg and McCann are sinister, they are also vulnerable. At the same time as Pinter fosters this expectation for naturalistic characterization, he systematically frustrates its fulfilment because of the characters' increasingly bizarre behaviour:

> The dialogue is often amusing , but most of the characters appear to be mentally deficient and what it all means is anyone's guess.
> (LM, *Theatre World* 21)

> Apart from a seaside deck chair ticket-collector . . . and a spritely bare-legged floozy . . . all the characters seemed to me to be in an advanced state of pottiness or vitamin deficiency, and quite possibly both. (Granger 15)

This behaviour is more consistent with that found in the absurdist drama of Ionesco. Stanley's irrational fear, Goldberg and McCann's unconventional interrogation, its effect on all three remain unexplainable in naturalistic terms. The reviewers' protests against the meaninglessness of the play is in part a consequence of its combination with this confusing blend of naturalistic and absurdist characterization. The emergence of bizarre or irrational behaviour suggests a doubleness in human interaction, a surface and an undercurrent.

Pinter's generic coding also contributes to this impression. As previously mentioned, he evokes the mix of detached criticism and sympathetic identification characteristic of tragicomedy. Of the playwrights examined here, this blend most closely resembles that volatile combination which, for Hirst, stirs up the emotions without allowing them a release. We find that our conflicting impulses to criticize and to sympathize place us in a new relation to the characters. While our laughter at the antics onstage eases our growing anxiety without entirely relieving it, our sympathy keeps us from the customary condescension with which we usually judge characters in comedy. The lack of resolution at the end further denies our natural desire to resolve these conflicting reactions. Pinter compounds this consternation with further generic modifications. He begins the play with the trappings of kitchen-sink drama - seedy setting, lower-class characters, simple "realistic" dialogue. Introducing the two strangers with their air of sinister mystery, he encourages the audience to

shift their expectations slightly to anticipate a play in the style of popular gangster movies. Then he undercuts the naturalistic and realistic styles typical of these two genres with absurdism. He undercuts these without abandoning them, however, maintaining a disconcerting façade of realism. The audience's inability to reconcile this superficial realism with the disturbing absurdist undercurrent contributes to its impression of doubleness, of something occurring beneath the surface of the dialogue and action.

This feeling that something is happening beneath the surface is what most spectators identify as the subtext in Pinter's plays. They recognize it as something menacing or disturbing. They may even identify something more specific: in *The Birthday Party*, they may feel that Goldberg and McCann's treatment of Stanley represents the pressure society places on the individual to conform. However, we can pinpoint the nature of the subtext common to all of Pinter's plays with something more accurate than a general atmosphere of menace. Pinter regrets that he once flippantly described his plays as "the weasel under the cocktail cabinet" ("Introduction" *Pinter Plays: Four* ix). Much as he despairs of this metaphor, it does capture our sense of an everyday, respectable surface camouflaging something sinister. That something sinister is power, its use by society or an individual to subjugate or dominate others.[21] No matter how ordinary the relationships appear, the characters are always using language and action indirectly to exert or to resist influence. Power lies at the heart of Pinter's vision of human relationships. He suggests that it underlies the everyday conflicts of our ordinary lives. His aesthetic

coding nurtures this sense of doubleness, of menace beneath the ordinary surface. His linguistic and systemic coding function deictically and symbolically, drawing attention to and embodying that subtext of power. Like Beckett, Pinter relies on self-referentiality and subversion to guide his audience through his subtextual jungle.

The threat of someone exerting power in Pinter's plays appears in two forms: that from a stranger, an outsider, and that from someone familiar, within the home. Typically, Pinter's characters inhabit rooms which represent security at the beginning of the play. Usually an outsider threatens to disrupt this delusion of safety with some form of change. In *The Birthday Party*, Stanley betrays fear the moment he hears of two strangers coming to the boarding house. Both his and McCann's behaviour feeds our suspicion that he is nervous and that his fear is justified:

> Stanley. I'm sorry. I'm not in the mood for a party tonight.
> McCann. Oh, is that so? I'm sorry.
> Stanley. Yes, I'm going out to celebrate quietly, on my own.
> McCann. That's a shame.
>
> *They stand.*
>
> Stanley. Well, if you'd move out of my way--McCann. But everything's laid on. The guests are expected.
> Stanley. Guests? What guests?
> McCann. Myself for one. I had the honour of an invitation.
>
> McCann *begins to whistle "The Mountains of Morne".*
>
> Stanley (*moving away*). I wouldn't call it an honour, would you? It'll just be another booze-up.

> Stanley *joins* McCann *in whistling "The Mountains of Morne." During the next five lines the whistling is continuous, one whistling while the other speaks, and both whistling together.*
>
> McCann. But it is an honour.
> Stanley. I'd say you were exaggerating.
> McCann. Oh no. I'd say it was an honour.
> Stanley. I'd say that was plain stupid.
> McCann. Ah no.
>
> *They stare at each other.* (48)

Stanley transgresses the quality maxim in pretending he will celebrate a birthday he earlier disclaims. Just previous to this exchange, McCann ominously holds his grip while shaking hands with Stanley (kinesics). The two now stand awkwardly in a confrontational stance until Stanley backs down, moving away (proxemics). Later, when he moves around the table toward the door, McCann meets him, blocking his way (proxemics). McCann stretches the quality maxim by insisting on the honour of being invited, and his over-insistence on this point verges onto breaking the quantity maxim. The pretended nonchalance of their whistling (musical codes) too is exposed by the curious manner in which they alternate between whistling and contradicting one another. The final stare confirms their mutual hostility (kinesics). The conversational transgressions, the discrepancies between language and action and between language and music subvert these characters' attempts to appear casual, alerting us to their covert motivations and intentions: Stanley would like to escape, but McCann prevents him.

While the intruder seems a natural source of threat, someone familiar within the sanctuary is often a more subtle and disarmingly unexpected source as well.

While Goldberg and McCann obviously pose a threat to Stanley, his landlady, Meg, also undermines his individuality and independence. Her mindless chatter and banality threaten to assimilate him into a stultifying mediocrity. For instance, he jeers at her cloying insistence on using the word "nice" to describe everything, resisting her by replacing it with another adjective, "succulent," which she interprets as sexually suggestive:

> Meg. Stan?
> Stanley. What?
> Meg (*shyly*). Am I really succulent?
> Stanley. Oh, you are. I'd rather have you than a cold in the nose any day.
> Meg. You're just saying that.
> Stanley (*violently*). Look, why don't you get this place cleared up! It's a pigsty. And another thing, what about my room? It needs sweeping. It needs papering. I need a new room!
> Meg (*sensual, stroking his arm*). Oh, Stan, that's a lovely room. I've had some lovely afternoons in that room.
>
> *He recoils from her hand in disgust, stands and exits quickly by the door on left.* (29)

Meg's shy tone suggests she is flirting with him in an other than motherly manner (paralinguistics). Stanley's sarcastic retort is both a transgression of the manner maxim and an example of antiphrasis (semantics). His violent tone (paralinguistics) and abrupt attack (relevance) betray his irritation. Meg's stroking and words again are sexually suggestive and disturbingly incongruous with her motherly demeanour. Stanley's withdrawal (proxemics) confirms the unseemliness of her behaviour. Her reverse-oedipal overtures threaten to smother Stanley even as she attempts to nurture

him. Again the subversive dramatic coding deictically reveals the threat underlying the superficially innocuous.

All of this subtextual manoeuvring can certainly be confusing. However, without providing a full explanation, Pinter will occasionally give his characters a statement which will draw our attention to these covert tactics. In the initial exchange between Stanley and McCann quoted above, Stanley draws overt attention to McCann's strategies. First he openly asks McCann to move out of the way, ensuring we will notice how the latter stands menacingly in his way. Second, he questions McCann's use of the term "honour," causing us to wonder about the purpose behind this dishonesty. His insistence on refuting this point then serves to underline our awareness of his uneasiness. In making these remarks, Stanley also indirectly informs McCann that he is aware of, and resists the thug's tactics.

Just as he uses these overt remarks to attract our attention to the linguistic and systemic coding, Pinter uses self-reflexive references (like Beckett) to draw attention to some of the changes he makes in the aesthetic coding. Near the beginning of the first act of *The Birthday Party*, for example, we overhear the owners of the boarding house:

> Petey. There's a new show coming to the Palace.
> Meg. On the pier?
> Petey. No. The Palace, in the town.
> Meg. Stanley could have been in it, if it was on the pier.
> Petey. This is a straight show.
> Meg. What do you mean?
> Petey. No dancing or singing.
> Meg. What do they do then?

Petey. They just talk.

Pause. (23)

Here he makes us self-conscious not only that we are watching a play, but also about the nature of that play. So far, the play has been just this, two people talking over breakfast. Pinter makes overt what the audience has thus far decoded concerning the naturalistic style. He also draws overt attention to the importance of talk. Though this play has decidedly more physical action than later works, much of the most important action is still accomplished through the dialogue: who does what with words to whom. Another self-reflexive reference to the nature of action occurs during the interrogation scene:

> Goldberg. Is the number 846 possible or necessary?
> Stanley. Neither.
> Goldberg. Wrong! Is the number 846 possible or necessary?
> Stanley. Both.
> Goldberg. Wrong! It's necessary but not possible.
> Stanley. Both.
> Goldberg. Wrong! Why do you think the number 846 is necessarily possible?
> Stanley. Must be.
> Goldberg. Wrong! It's only necessarily necessary! We admit possibility only after we grant necessity. It is possible because necessary but by no means necessary through possibility. The possibility can only be assumed after the proof of necessity.
> McCann. Right! (60)

This transgression of manner makes reference to Aristotle's principles concerning what incidents, what actions are properly included in drama: "the poet's business is to tell not what is happening but the sorts of things that might (be expected to) happen -- things that, according to likelihood [probability] and necessity, *can* (happen)"

(Walley's italics and parenthesis, my brackets - 31, 33). Through Goldberg, Pinter reminds us that, as confusing and unconventional as these characters and their actions may seem, they combine to convey a credible and important truth. In fact, they may be necessary to make it possible for us to become aware of and to understand the subtext.

Even when Pinter's language is not overtly self-reflexive, his linguistic codes still often function deictically to focus our attention on a change in the aesthetic coding. Goldberg's evasiveness when the two strangers first arrive at the boarding house, for example, transgresses the quantity maxim, making us acutely aware of how little background information Pinter provides us:

> Goldberg. What is it, McCann? You don't trust me like you did in the old days?
> McCann. Sure I trust you, Nat.
> Goldberg. But why is it that before you do a job you're all over the place, and when you're doing the job you're as cool as a whistle?
> McCann. I don't know, Nat. I'm just all right once I know what I'm doing. When I know what I'm doing, I'm all right.
> Goldberg. Well, you do it very well. (38-9)

The emphasis on the vague term "job" (semantics, quantity) as well as the uneasy questions and McCann's nervous repetition (syntax) suggest that an unpleasant purpose brings them to the boarding house. Later Stanley questions Meg concerning these new lodgers (quantity, relevance), revealing his nervousness, and McCann violates the quality maxim, telling Stanley they are on a short holiday. Both incidents serve to remind us how little we know about the two men and to arouse our suspicions.

The linguistic and systemic codes similarly direct attention to the new ethical coding. The passage above is just one of many occasions (repetition reinforcing our awareness of both the device and the subtext) on which McCann reveals his uneasiness, thereby violating our expectations of a sinister thug:

> McCann (*rising swiftly and going behind* Goldberg's *chair. Hissing*). Let's finish and go. Let's get it over and go. Get the thing done. Let's finish the bloody thing. Let's get the thing done and go! (86)

McCann's nervous movements (proxemics), his hissing (paralinguistics), the anaphora, epistrophe and symploche (syntax), the impreciseness (semantics, quantity) combine to undermine the cool self-possession which the Irishman exhibits elsewhere and which we would anticipate from a thug. The degree to which both he and Goldberg are shaken suggests they are as much victims of their line of work as Stanley is. Goldberg betrays his vulnerability in curious behaviour (kinesics):

> Goldberg. And that's why I've reached my position, McCann. Because I've always been as fit as a fiddle. My motto. Work hard and play hard. Not a day's illness.
> Goldberg *sits*.
>
> All the same, give me a blow. (*Pause.*) Blow in my mouth.
>
> McCann *stands, puts his hands on his knees, bends, and blows in* Goldberg's *mouth*.
>
> One for the road.
>
> McCann *blows again in his mouth*. Goldberg *breathes deeply, smiles*.
>
> Right! (88-89)

In early plays such as this one, Pinter frequently includes absurdist kinesic coding. Stanley marches in circles beating his drum savagely as though possessed. McCann tears a newspaper into strips in an image of mindless destruction. He and Goldberg shine a torch on Stanley as though he were being accused and interrogated rather than toasted and praised by Meg. McCann snaps the frames of Stanley's glasses. These actions are largely incomprehensible in strictly rational cause-and-effect terms. Instead, they interrupt the naturalistic coding, drawing attention to unspoken conflicts. Stanley's drumming suggests his frustration with Meg and his fear of the two strangers. McCann and Goldberg's actions indirectly convey the threat they pose to Stanley. This kinesic coding breaks the naturalistic sequence of cause and effect. This prompts us to feel that there is something else going on, to look for a different kind of significance than that we expect. Once audiences become increasingly familiar with Pinter's style, they need fewer of these rather overt deictic signs to draw them to the subtext. They naturally begin to expect to look for another level of unspoken conflict beneath the naturalistic surface. This absurdist element disappears almost entirely from *Betrayal* which, apart from an inverted chronology, proceeds in traditional realistic style. The subtext is still present, but these rather sensational effects are no longer necessary to draw attention to it.

The audience also becomes aware of the subtext through the sheer frequency with which Pinter uses his codes. His characters transgress the conversational maxims consistently, consecutively and even simultaneously. The density of these transgressions creates a persistent impression that more is being implied than is

actually said. Moreover, Pinter regularly uses a discrepancy between words and paralinguistic codes, between the words and kinesic and proxemic codes, which again contributes to the audience's impression that more is going on than the superficial dialogue would suggest. Finally, there is a discrepancy between very ordinary surroundings (scenic codes) and sinister incidents. As his career progresses, Pinter's settings and characters gain in status, becoming increasingly familiar to his largely middle and upper-middle-class audience. This indicates two things. First, it reinforces our suspicion that this kind of intimidation and manipulation occurs among ordinary people like ourselves. This shift, like the move away from overtly bizarre behaviour, reflects a diminishing need for such coding to draw attention to the subtext. The density of other codes becomes sufficient to convey underlying meanings and interactions.

These discrepancies in the linguistic and systemic coding are part of the undercoding which baffled audiences at the early performances of Pinter's plays. Their frequency and simultaneity subvert our expectations, keeping us constantly occupied with trying to reconcile these discrepancies. The ironic tension in the aesthetic coding fosters a sense of doubleness running throughout the play. Structurally, Pinter indicates that there is continuity, purpose, and resolution, but he refuses to provide adequate exposition or explanation. This creates a strong impression of another level of communication and action beneath the surface dialogue and behaviour. The contrasting naturalism and absurdism in the ethical coding also suggests something disturbing beneath the surface. In addition to the tragicomic mix,

Pinter injects into what initially appears to be kitchen-sink naturalistic drama a flavour of gangster movies and a large dose of Ionesco-style absurdism. Again this raises and denies expectations, confusing the audience and encouraging it to feel that something else, something more is going on. Not surprisingly, many spectators experience a rather extreme form of psychological dissonance during a performance of a Pinter play that goes beyond a simple distaste for the sometimes unsavoury characters and behaviour he depicts. Pinter forces them to perform a radical restructuring of their responses.

Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*

The last of Pinter's full-length plays, *Betrayal*, marks an interesting trend in the subtextual evolution which is also in evidence in Stoppard's play *The Real Thing*: a return to realism. However, this is realism viewed through the prism of twentieth-century subtextual practice; it is realism with an edge. Much of the aesthetic coding reverts somewhat to that with which we began, without becoming exactly the same. All of the linguistic and systemic coding, the complementarity and discrepancy between signs, the deictic and symbolic signs, the strategies of explanation, repetition, contrast, self-referentiality and subversion are all in evidence, but with a new complexion. It may be no coincidence that Pinter's last full-length play is his most realistic. He has perhaps educated his audience sufficiently to recognize all of his subtextual coding in the most "realistic" of behaviour and situations. Some might say he has achieved subtext's goal of "realistically" rendering human communication and interaction. Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, however, questions not only whether this goal has been reached, not only whether this is possible, but also whether this is even desirable.

Although Stoppard's first play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, gained popularity and acceptance from both audiences and many reviewers much

more quickly than Pinter's early plays, many critics interpreted this popularity negatively. The wit and cleverness that appealed to many spectators and reviewers was regarded by others as evidence of insubstantiality:

> The play is a conception of genius, which requires genius to develop it, whereas, in the event, it gets only cleverness and charm. (Simon 664)

> The idea is brilliant and produces a certain amount of fun, but I don't think it is worked out with complete success. (Weightman 38)

> The play strikes me as a noble conception which has not been endowed with any real weight or texture. (Brustein 25)

Stoppard introduced an innovative intertextuality that generally delighted his audiences. However, while this innovation delighted many, for others it provided the foundation for their charges of superficiality:

> *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a theatrical parasite, feeding off *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* - Shakespeare provides the characters, Pirandello the technique, and Beckett the tone with which the Stoppard play proceeds. . .
>
> In outline, the idea is extremely ingenious; in execution, it is derivative and familiar, even prosaic. As an artist, Stoppard does not fight hard enough for his insights - they all seem to come to him, prefabricated, from other plays - with the result that his air of pessimism seems affected, and his philosophical meditations, while witty and urbane, never obtain the thickness of *felt* knowledge. (Brustein 25-26)

The play drew the now familiar criticisms of post-modern art: the play is "voguish" in its "cuteness" (Brustein 26); it displays the "kitsch" and "camp" of "inconsequential Pop-art" (Weightman 39-40). These responses are typical in their

misunderstanding of a new approach. Stoppard's intertextuality is not misleading in the overtly mystifying or obscure manner that previous subtextual plays are. Here, recognition and delight replace frustration and confusion. The audiences' delight largely derives from its recognition of previous plays within the new play. This seems to have misled some to misinterpret this technique as merely gratuitous. However, it is actually a modification of the structural code which shapes the action and our response to it.

Even while some generally misunderstood the technique, their criticisms revealed slivers of useful observation. One compares the intertextuality to "large chunks of Beckett, Pinter, and Pirandello, like sliding bulges on a python as he digests rabbits swallowed whole" (Simon 664). Stoppard's borrowings from other playwrights are not simply allusive or revisionist. He incorporates entire passages, characters, moods, philosophies and plot outlines from other playwrights. This is not merely cleverness or laziness. While one critic worries that "the action is not a legitimate extension of the minimal identity that Shakespeare gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet*, and so Mr. Stoppard's play operates at an uncomfortable tangent to Shakespeare's" (Weightman 38), another celebrates *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as "a play where you are encouraged to stand outside the action and let suspicions, thoughts, glimmers and insights criss-cross your understanding" (Barnes 53). Stoppard's intertextual technique encourages the audience to remember the entire texts from which he borrows. Their juxtaposition in one play encourages us to contrast differing ideas and techniques, to see the old texts

in a new light. If we engage in this process, we become aware of a subtext emerging from this juxtaposition.

In the case of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* we have the interplay between a traditional classic and a modern existential play. Stoppard's play remains largely absurdist. However, like Pinter, Stoppard increasingly turns to realism, if in a somewhat transformed state. In *The Real Thing*, for example, the main action occurs in a realistic vein, with the intertexts appearing plausibly as plays within the play. Pinter's *Betrayal* and Stoppard's *The Real Thing* suggest an intriguing return to the realism, though transformed, from which subtextual plays originated and departed at the end of the last century. As I have already examined two absurdist plays, I would like to move beyond Stoppard's first play to *The Real Thing*. This work is particularly relevant to this analysis as it not only juxtaposes different styles of plays with the intention of encouraging their re-evaluation from which a subtext emerges, it also juxtaposes different styles of subtext, similarly encouraging their re-evaluation in the process of generating its own subtext.

The return to a modified realism involves a return to some of the aesthetic coding abandoned by the subtextual playwrights. Structurally, *The Real Thing* follows the Aristotelian model of beginning, middle and end. The action begins with the end of Henry's marriage to Charlotte and the beginning of a new one to Annie. The characters' behaviour is comprehensible within the parameters of traditional cause-and-effect. We have a clear sense of who the characters are and why they act as they do. Henry and Annie's marriage endures a crisis which is resolved in her rejecting

Billy in favour of Henry. Henry does acquire "self-knowledge through pain" (62). Yet despite this reconciliation and Max's announcement of his engagement, the play retains a tentativeness. We wonder if any of the characters has truly discovered the "real thing" and whether these unions will endure. Though the structure appears to be the familiar closed form, a century of plays with open structures has left its imprint. This tentativeness engenders an unsettling sensation which is in part attributable to, while considerably milder than, the intense disorientation the spectator experiences during the play itself. Stoppard inflicts this disorientation by incorporating a new structural technique which modifies, without entirely violating, the play's realism. This new structure, intertextuality, juxtaposes different forms of drama such as poetic, realistic, naturalistic and absurdist by either incorporating actual passages from previous texts or by imitating a particular author's style. In *The Real Thing*, Stoppard introduces not only one familiar style of play, but also of subtext, only to summon another and another. The audience, forced to shift from one style to another, naturally draws comparisons, questioning the validity of each. We find ourselves wondering which is the most authentic representation, which is the most "real."

As with his structural coding, Stoppard reverts to a more traditional ethical coding to which the intertextuality adds a new dimension. We have a moral centre once again in the character of Henry who, despite certain foibles, is charmingly and consistently sympathetic. Instead of feeling detached from or superior to him, we share his confusion over, and his desire to learn, what is real, particularly what is real

love. However, while Henry must rely on his own experiences, we have the intertexts which not only present different views of forbidden love but how different playwrights have attempted to render that experience. So we have actual excerpts from Ford's Carolinean poetic drama *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, about incest and infidelity,[22] and from Strindberg's naturalistic *Miss Julie*, about premarital sex between the classes. We have an excerpt from a fictional play "House of Cards," which has the distinct flavour of Coward with a dash of Pinter, about suspected infidelity.[23] Moreover, we have echoes and motifs from three plays about infidelity and jealousy which summon up the differing approaches: the handkerchief from *Othello*; the Cowardesque "'how's your lover today, Amanda?' 'In the pink, Charles. How's yours?'" (72) - which perhaps also refers to Pinter's "The Lovers" - as well the frequently repeated "all rights" and the references to Norfolk, buck's fizz, Switzerland and "The Skater's Waltz" borrowed directly from *Private Lives*; and the squash player from Pinter's *Betrayal*. As each appears, the audience naturally remembers and contrasts the responses each play or style usually summons. Henry leads us through these responses, writing about, commenting on, reacting to and experiencing love, jealousy and infidelity. Still, despite Henry's function as moral centre or guide, he does not lead us to any satisfactory conclusion about what is "real," but leaves us still questioning at the end of the play.

The generic coding once again promises conventional coding only to have the intertextuality unsettle the expected sense of resolution. *The Real Thing* emphasises the comic component in the tragicomic blend without quite returning to the confident

resolutions of simple comedy. Although the conclusion's pairings display the familiar comic artificiality, this ironically serves to undermine rather than to confirm our optimism about the couples' love as genuine and enduring. Furthermore, Stoppard's intertextuality nurtures our doubts. It allows him to contrast different genres: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Othello* are tragedies; Brodie's play is political drama; *Betrayal* and *Miss Julie* are tragicomedies; and "House of Cards" and *Private Lives* are comedies. But while the intertextual inclusion of these plays summons a memory of how we usually respond to each genre, their juxtaposition encourages a detached objective analysis characteristic of comedy. This detachment co-exists and often conflicts with our identification with Henry. Like Henry we want to be "believers," but our intertextual analysis of love, jealousy and infidelity does not necessarily support this hope. Stoppard undercuts each representation of "reality" until we begin to doubt whether a playwright can adequately render the experience of love, even using subtext. We begin to mistrust not only the play's reconciliation and its implication that the characters have discovered "the real thing" but, by extension, our ability to recognize "the real thing" in art and the "real" world.

Henry's marital woes and his search for love constitute the surface conflict of the play. The difficulty in identifying what is real, be it love, political commitment, art etc., emerges as the underlying conflict. Stoppard draws our attention to this dilemma borrowing the strategies of explanation, repetition and contrast from the modern playwrights, Ibsen and Chekhov, and the strategies of self-referentiality and subversion from the postmoderns, Beckett and Pinter. He combines these with

intertextuality, explaining, repeating and contrasting scenes, styles of plays and even subtextual techniques, sometimes in order to subvert each other, always with the effect of drawing our attention to their essential artificiality. Thus he focuses on a disturbing paradox of subtext: despite its origins in a desire to render reality and later psychological reality, despite its reliance on communication codes found in everyday exchanges, subtext is ultimately artificial. Moreover, this artificiality is more "realistic" than a strict transfer of reality onto the stage. *The Real Thing* highlights these unsettling paradoxes and, true to subtextual form, leaves them unresolved which, in turn, leaves the spectator to ponder them long after the stage is empty.

Whereas Ibsen and Chekhov use repetition and contrast to build a subtext and to guide the audience through unfamiliar territory, Stoppard uses these strategies in an unsettling, even disorienting fashion, often combining them with the subversive strategy seen in the later postmodern playwrights. For instance, he duplicates his systemic codes from scene to scene in order to raise certain expectations within the audience, only to subvert them. In the stage directions to Scenes Three and Nine, he specifies similarities in the systemic codes with those of Scene One. So each scene opens with a similar arrangement of doors and furniture (scenic codes) and a man sitting alone until his wife enters wearing a topcoat which she removes (proxemic, kinesic and costumic codes). In Scenes One and Nine, she carries a suitcase, approaches the man and hands him a gift (proxemic and scenic codes). Similarly, the men speak in implicatures, insinuating that they believe their wives to be unfaithful:

> Max. How's old Basel, then? Keeping fit?
> Charlotte. Are you a tiny bit sloshed?

Max. Certainly.
Charlotte. I didn't go to Basel.

Max *is discreetly but definitely interested by that.*

Max. No? Where did you go, then?
Charlotte. Geneva.

Max *is surprised. He cackles.*

Max. Geneva!

He drinks from his glass.

How's old Geneva, then? Franc doing well?
Charlotte. Who?

He affects surprise.

Max. The Swiss franc. Is it doing well? (10-11)

When he confronts Annie in Scene Three, Max less wittily, but with a certain Pinteresque rhythm, mimics this implicature, "How's Julie? . . . Julie. Miss Julie. Strindberg's Miss Julie. Miss Julie by August Strindberg, how is she?" (36). In addition to the syntax and the implicature, the echo here from the fictional play itself is subtextually suggestive. Henry too resorts to indirect probing in Scene Nine: "I thought you were coming back overnight? . . . I thought you were on the sleeper. . . . I was wondering what happened to you. . . . Did you catch the early train this morning, then?" (68). This repetition early in these scenes alerts the audience to the underlying tensions and suspicions. Stoppard then uses contrasting resolutions to question how we really react to adultery. The confrontation in the first scene is conducted in the smart, sophisticated banter of a Coward comedy. In contrast, Max and Henry, in the two subsequent scenes, "come apart like a pick-a-

sticks" much as Charlotte imagined her husband, at least, would (22). This subversiveness distinguishes Stoppard's repetition and contrast from Ibsen and Chekhov's but it still functions deictically, attracting the audience's attention with its disorienting nature.

Also like Ibsen and Chekhov, Stoppard occasionally uses explicit explanation to draw attention to the subtext as well as to clarify what the audience will subsequently decode or to confirm what it has already decoded. For example, Annie and Henry explicitly, if somewhat inarticulately ("Touch me," "I love you" 27), declare their love for one another while Charlotte and Max occupy themselves making dip in the kitchen. This prepares the audience for the ensuing scene in which Annie and Henry simultaneously participate in the superficial conversation with Max and Charlotte while exchanging secret apologies and absolutions for Henry's cowardly failure to reveal their affair:

> Charlotte. Henry thinks he has a sense of humour, but what he has is a joke reflex. Eh, Henry? His mind is racing. Pineapple, pineapple ... Come on, darling.
> Henry (*to* Annie). No. Sorry.
> Annie. It's all right.
> Charlotte (*busy with cutlery*). Is Debbie expecting lunch?
> Henry (*to* Annie). No.
> Charlotte. What?
> Henry. No. She wants to stay out.
>
> Annie *drinks what remains in her glass.*
>
> Annie. Where is Debbie?
> Henry. Riding school. Drink?
>
> Henry *takes her empty glass out of her hand.*

Annie. Love you.
Charlotte. She used to eat like a horse, till she had one.

Henry *refills* Annie's *glass*.

Henry. I'm picking her up this afternoon.

He returns Annie's *glass*.

Buck's fizz all right?
Charlotte. Picking her up?
Annie. I don't care.

Max *enters with the Hawaiian dip in the pineapple tin*.

Max. Here we are.
Annie. Anything's all right. (29)

Later Henry goads Annie into recounting her first encounter with Brodie, ostensibly as an opportunity to annoy Charlotte, who specifically warned him not to bring up the subject, and to antagonize Max's naive idealism. Charlotte appears to make Henry's motives explicit when she tells him to "Shut up" and affirms to Max that, "Yes, he's being like that" (32). These motivations may be valid up to a point, but just before she leaves, Henry confesses to Annie that, "It was just so I could look at you without it looking funny" (35). Here Stoppard makes Henry's motives clear, but instead of simply confirming or clarifying the subtext, he suggests that such motivations and tensions are much too complex for a single explicit explanation. Moreover, he stirs a certain mistrust in even our experienced abilities to decode fully any given subtextual scene.

In addition to overt explanation, Stoppard uses its postmodern heir, self-referentiality. He not only exploits one of the oldest self-reflexive devices, the play-

within-a-play, he multiplies it, using several plays to "ambush" the spectator.[24] After Charlotte's departure in Scene One, the audience believes Henry in Act Two is her lover and Max her cuckolded, jilted husband. We begin to decode the subtext of an uncomfortable lovers' triangle only to realize that we have misinterpreted it. Our decoding skills eventually reveal to us a different subtext consisting of Henry and Charlotte's marital tensions, Henry and Max's personality conflict as well as Henry and Annie's affair. Later, Stoppard tricks us again with Brodie's play. Having mistaken the play in Scene One for "real" action, we are quick to interpret the first train scene between Billy and Annie as yet another play, only to be fooled again. Using these plays, Stoppard undermines our sense of what is real.

Moreover, Stoppard contrasts different versions of Brodie's play. Annie argues that the imprisoned soldier's play should be considered as worthy as those written with a full awareness of English dramatic tradition. It should be equally valued, perhaps even more so, because it is based on "real" life. However, Brodie's text is flawed partly because its dialogue resembles too closely "real" conversation, and even Henry's attempt to rescue it with stylized dialogue and with subtext remains unsatisfactory. Henry is unable to transform Brodie's play into something that at least appears real because it is based on false emotions and motivations. Once Annie confesses that both her own and Brodie's political commitments were false and what Brodie was really like, Henry declares he could have written the "real" Brodie. So while a playwright does not simply transfer "reality" to the stage, he must at least have a firm sense of what the reality of his subject is. Henry, for example, has

difficulty writing about love. He complains that he can write only superficial, witty, Cowardesque dialogue. This is because he has no real experience with the pain of infidelity. As Charlotte tells him, "You've still got one [virginity] to lose" (67). Both the "House of Cards" and Brodie's play are unsatisfactory because neither is written with a firm sense of the "real."

In addition to "The House of Cards" and Brodie's play, Stoppard incorporates "real" plays within his play. This incorporation ranges from motifs and echoes to entire sections of the original dialogue. In each case, he subverts the play from which he borrows. For example, Iago uses the handkerchief in *Othello* to create the appearance of infidelity; in *The Real Thing* the handkerchief is proof of an affair. As opposed to *Betrayal*, Max does not betray his squash partner, yet an affair is afoot. The allusions to, and echoes of, Coward's *Private Lives* raise an expectation for cavalier cleverness which Stoppard disappoints with both Max's and Henry's displays of vulnerability and raw emotion. When Henry and Annie read the sexually charged scene from *Miss Julie "without inflection,"* they effectively undermine the subtext of the play while simultaneously betraying the unexpressed, though building tension between themselves (39-40). Later, when Annie discourages Billy from flirting with her, he resorts to reciting Giovanni's declaration of love to Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*:

> Billy. Here!
>
> *His 'reading' has been getting less and less discreet. Now he stands up and opens his shirt.*)
>
> Annie (*giggling*). Oh, leave off.

She looks around nervously.

Billy (*starting to shout*). And here's my breast; strike
home!
Rip up my bosom; there thou shalt behold
A heart in which is writ the truth I speak.
Annie. You daft idiot.
Billy. Yes, most earnest. You cannot love?
Annie. Stop it.
Billy. My tortured soul
Hath felt affliction in the heat of death.
Oh, Annabella, I am quite undone!
Annie. Billy! (59)

Stoppard has Billy ironically use an overtly declarative passage to indirectly declare his feelings for Annie. Annie too uses a declarative scene from the same play, just after Annabella and Giovanni have consummated their love, to accept Billy's advances, returning his kiss in earnest and whispering his name (67-68). Not only is Stoppard subverting and transforming the declarative text into subtext, he transforms the "illusion" of passion between two actors in a play into "real" passion between two actors as individuals. Again, he challenges our sense of reality and artifice, and how subtext relates to these.

As part of the self-reflexiveness of this play, Stoppard even draws overt attention to subtext and how it functions. When Henry despairs of ever capturing "real" emotion in his dialogue, Annie counsels him:

Annie. You'll have to learn to do sub-text. My
Strindberg is steaming with lust, but there is
nothing rude on the page. We just talk round it.
Then he [Billy] sort of bites my finger and I do
the heavy breathing and he gives me a quick feel,
kisses me on the neck ... (40)

Annie refers here to the linguistic and systemic coding which form the basis of subtext in this century. Stoppard also draws attention to the Pinteresque subtext in "The House of Cards." When Max attempts in a typically indirect fashion to provoke Charlotte into betraying herself, she responds - as many a frustrated spectator has wished a Pinter character would - with a direct confrontation:

> Charlotte (*to call a halt*). All right.
> Max. Just all right? Well, that's the bloody Swiss for you. Conservative, you see. The Japs could show them a thing or two. They'd have a whaling fleet in Lake Geneva by now. How's the skiing, by the way? Plenty of snow?
> Charlotte. Stop it - stop it - *stop it*. What have I done? (12)

In undermining the familiar Pinteresque subtextual technique, Stoppard draws attention to subtext, acknowledges our response to it and reveals its essential artificiality.

But even as he acknowledges our frustrations, Stoppard mischievously undermines them. He contrasts them with those the playwright experiences when just such objections are raised. Max voices these objections to his character's confusing, apparently irrelevant tirade on the Japanese, the Swiss and watchmaking (relevance and manner maxims):

> Max. All the laughs were in place, for a Saturday Night anyway, and I had someone who came round afterwards who said the reconciliation scene was extremely moving. Actually, that reminds me. They *did* say - I mean, it's a tiny thing but I thought I'd pass it on because I do feel rather the same way ... I mean all that stuff about the Japanese and digital watches - they suddenly have

no idea what I'm talking about, you see, and I
thought if we could just try it one night without-

Henry *halts him, like a traffic policeman.* (20)

Through Henry's impatience with Max's inability to recognize the function of this passage as implicature, Stoppard gently revenges himself and all subtextual playwrights on spectators and reviewers guilty of sounding similar protests. Yet, even as Stoppard subverts subtextual technique, exposing its artificiality, he does not condemn it as spurious. Rather, he reaffirms subtext's aim to render "realistic" human experience, vindicating its original departure from declarative verse. The play's dialogue does not accurately resemble "real" conversation. Yet, Henry's inarticulate, "Oh please, please, please, please *don't*" to the background strains of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" at the end of Scene Eleven authentically conveys the pain of infidelity. This self-reflexivity makes us aware not only of the subtextual techniques, but also of the degree to which we have now become familiar with and accepting of them. We realize that both the naturalistic and the absurdist subtextual techniques are essentially artificial conventions which we have learned to decode until we hardly notice them anymore.

Stoppard combines these familiar codes and strategies with a new structural code of intertextuality in much the same way that Ibsen combines familiar euphemism with unfamiliar implicature. This strategy functions like Ibsen's in that it draws attention and guides the audience to the subtextual tension between illusion and reality. This juxtaposition of texts and subtexts forces us to question not simply whether one is more "realistic" than the others, but whether subtextual techniques

themselves are "realistic." If we accept that these are ultimately artificial, has subtext failed to reach its initial goal of authentically rendering reality? The intertext indicated in the title of the play leads us to the answer to this question. In Henry James' short story "The Real Thing," an artist discovers that his paintings capture the essence of genteel figures much more effectively by using lower-class models rather than a "real" lady and gentleman. He finds that art transforms the artificial into something that is more "real" than a strict reproduction of that in the "real" world. In the century since James wrote this story, modern drama has undergone the same experience and drawn the same conclusions as his narrator. While the earlier playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov developed techniques aimed toward a more naturalistic representation as being "real," the later playwrights such as Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard transformed, often through subversion, those techniques to realize a psychological "reality." No worthwhile dramatic representation exactly replicates "real" dialogue, action or situation;[25] a play's rendering of "reality" is necessarily crafted in order to fly (to borrow Henry's cricket metaphor) or it will fall short, much like Brodie's play. Pinter describes the balance he attempts to maintain between realism and artificiality:

> Given characters who possess a momentum of their own, my job is not to impose upon them, not to subject them to a false articulation, by which I mean forcing a character to speak where he could not speak, making him speak in a way he could not speak, or making him speak of what he could never speak. . . .
>
> I'd like to make quite clear at the same time that I don't regard my own characters as uncontrolled, or anarchic. They're not. The function of selection and arrangement is mine. I do all the donkeywork, in fact,

> and I think I can say I pay meticulous attention to the shape of things, from the shape of a sentence to the overall structure of the play. ("Writing for the Theatre" 14)

Subtextual playwrights have borrowed and shaped the inarticulateness, the evasiveness of "real" communication in order to fashion plays which communicate something almost intangible but no less "real" about human interaction and experience.

CONCLUSION

As Esslin asserts, a semiotic analysis of a dramatic text yields an essential understanding of the signs which combine to create meaning in a play. This is particularly helpful when analysing the meaning indirectly expressed by characters to one another in a play and that which is indirectly expressed by the playwright through the play to the audience. In separating the threads of this dramatic coding, we have been able to examine how the various linguistic, systemic and aesthetic codes combine into one subtextual strand. Elam distinguishes dramatic coding, that which is written into the text by the author, from theatrical coding, that which is determined by the actors, directors and contexts in which the play is produced. The riches this study uncovers in its examination of the dramatic coding of subtext suggest that a study of the theatrical coding of subtext might prove equally rewarding.

In the meantime, this semiotic analysis suggests several developments in the evolution of subtext in modern drama. First we find there is a shift from the modern, naturalists' emphasis on complementarity as a means of mimicking reality to the postmodern absurdists' emphasis on discrepancy as a means of conveying a sense of non-naturalistic psychological reality. Secondly, we observe a movement from tragedy in Ibsen through tragicomedy in Chekhov, Beckett and Pinter to a tentative comedy in Stoppard. This is accompanied by a progression from realism through

naturalism and absurdism back to a modified realism. This new comedy and realism, as well as our perception of them, are influenced by a century of subtextual development so that these can never be, nor be viewed, as they once were. Stoppard and particularly Mamet in America appear to be working in a new style or sub-genre which has yet to be satisfactorily identified. Just as critics were once at a loss to categorize some of the developments in the 1950's until Esslin's label of absurdism was adopted, we seem to be experimenting with a number of terms such as "post-absurdist," "gritty realism" or "grimy realism" to identify this new development. We certainly see a distinction between the absurdist subtextual plays and Pinter's *Betrayal*, Stoppard's *The Real Thing* and the majority of Mamet's plays such as *Glengarry Glen Ross* or *Speed-the-Plow*. And despite the seeming return to its roots, this latest incarnation of subtext remains distinct from the generic and stylistic purity of the pre-modern and even Ibsen's realistic dramas. Finally, we observe a search for an authentic mode of rendering reality which ironically leads us back to the necessity of artifice in rendering "real" human emotion, interchange and experience.

Although there has not been room here to expand this study to include the American playwrights, I believe similar developments are evident in the evolution of subtext in American drama. The subtext in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* displays the characteristics of the early modern realistic or naturalistic plays. That in Albee's and Shepard's plays is representative of the later absurdist drama. And as already noted, Mamet's plays bear a strong resemblance to the more recent developments in Pinter's and Stoppard's works. The linguistic, systemic and aesthetic

coding as well as the use of complementarity and discrepancy, of such strategies as explanation, repetition, contrast, self-referentiality and subversion appear to be in evidence in these American texts. I suspect the distinguishing characteristic of the American subtextual plays would lie in a preoccupation with American themes and issues, with the American dream and its failure to materialize in particular. Again, this might prove to be interesting terrain for further exploration.

The distinguishing feature of all subtextual drama is its layering of conflict. Typically, a subtextual play establishes a superficial conflict under which the audience gradually perceives an unexpressed conflict. In attempting to process and integrate these two layers, spectators experience a third level of conflict when they discover that they cannot reconcile the questions the play's action raises. This irreconcilability and the consequential experience of psychological dissonance is the most essential element in identifying a subtextual play. While we sympathize with Hedda's dilemma in Ibsen's play, caught between her own desires and society's expectations of her as a woman, we find it difficult to reconcile her right to self-determination with killing herself and her unborn child. Chekhov also leaves us feeling ambivalent about his characters in *The Cherry Orchard* who are both sympathetic and exasperating, but none of whom function as a guiding moral centre. Moreover his combination of familiar genres into an unfamiliar mix and of familiar conflict with unfamiliar indecisive action increases our uneasiness with the play. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* systematically and disturbingly undermines all of our attempts to find meaning in the familiar traditional dramatic conventions. Pinter's emphasis on discrepancy and

subversion, on the other hand, convinces us that there is an elusive meaning on another level beneath the surface dialogue and behaviour. And Stoppard forces us to ponder a perplexing paradox inherent in subtext: in its desire to render reality and later psychological reality authentically, in its reliance on communication codes borrowed from everyday exchanges, subtext is nevertheless ultimately and necessarily artificial. In a world in which the "real" is difficult to distinguish from "illusion," the artificial creates an illusion that appears (though nothing is absolutely certain) to render a more authentic "reality" than the "real."

The reviews surveyed in this study indicate the audiences' initial resistance to restructuring when confronted with these irreconcilable issues. They record early departures and the incomprehension of those who chose to remain until the final curtain. However, the gradual acceptance over the years of these plays and others by these playwrights testifies to the ultimate willingness of audiences to undergo the third and most challenging method of restructuring, "seeking new consonant cognitions," which may in turn merely generate further dissonance. What prompts spectators to engage in a disturbing and potentially self-perpetuating process? In "The Pleasure of the Spectator," Ubersfeld observes how we derive pleasure from both transparent signs, those we readily recognize and relate to the world around us, and opaque signs:

> When [the spectator] is faced with signs which he does not understand, to which he cannot give a name (objects, gestures, discourse), which do not refer to anything in his experience, or, more simply, which pose a problem for him, the spectator's own inventiveness is stimulated: it is up to him to manufacture the relationship between the sign and its unintelligibility, or its relationship to the world . . . (133)

Ultimately, the process of decoding the subtext in the dramatic coding and of restructuring our perceptions is satisfying in the challenges it imposes and in the new perceptions and connections it nurtures in us as spectators.

NOTES

[1]The earliest reference to subtext which I have been able to locate is in Stanislavsky's *Building a Character* (107-110).

[2]Theodore Komisarjevsky was a Russian director whose London production of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1926 tempered the gloominess of most interpretations of the time by heightening the element of comedy and farce Chekhov himself declared crucial to the play.

[3]Two interesting examples of expressionist drama which "stage" or raise the subtext to the surface in order to expose and explore the psychological processes of its characters are O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and Alice Gerstenberg's "Overtones". O'Neill's characters speak their thoughts aloud in asides. Gerstenberg requires two actresses to play the superficial cultured self and the inner, primitive self for each of the two characters. The former interacts with the other's cultured self and her own primitive self; the latter with her cultured self only. In both plays the inner thoughts, emotions and motivations are openly expressed.

[4]Kowzan, Esslin and Elam all provide possible categories of theatrical signs. While I do not adopt any one system of categorization, Elam has had the most influence on my choice of terms and categories.

[5]Raymond Williams argues the superiority of verse over modern prose drama in this respect (21-28).

[6]Pinter writes that, "we have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: 'Failure of communication' ... and this phrase has been fixed to my work consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility." ("Writing for the Theatre" 15)

[7]I have taken these definitions from Weathers and Winchester's *New Strategies of Style*, Dupriez's *A Dictionary of Literary Devices*, Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

[8]I base this brief analysis on Brown's more detailed examination of this scene in *Theatre Language*, 34-38.

[9]I base my discussion of Bernard and his Theatre of Silence here and elsewhere in this study on Branford's *A Study of Jean-Jacques Bernard's théâtre de l'inexprimé*.

[10]See Elam 54, 92, Birdwhistle 54-58, Kowzan 64-65 and Esslin, *The Field of Drama* 69.

[11]Thompson discusses how Pinter "uses an image, a 'tableau,' to create the 'curtain'" (47), but only implies this might serve as a resolution as well.

[12]I base much of this analysis on Northam's discussion of *Hedda Gabler's* set, 147-50.

[13]Rovenţa-Frumuşani uses the terms indexical and iconic to refer to two types of settings, ascribing to them meanings different to those I borrow from Esslin (*The Field of Drama* 43-44). Her term indexical seems to encompass what I refer to as the iconic and deictic (indexical) and her use of iconic seems to parallel how I use the term symbolic.

[14]Vladimir and Estragon as tramps could been seen as examples of the post-modern emphasis on the "ex-centric," the marginalized which Hutcheon sees as part of its questioning of traditional perceptions and values ("Decentering the Postmodern: The 'Ex-centric,'" *A Poetics of Postmodernism*).

[15]I have identified the following songs and their copyright dates from which Pinter excerpts lines: "She's Funny That Way" (1928); "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" (1933); "Blue Moon" (1933); I Get A Kick Out Of You" (1934); "Lovely to Look At" (1935); "These Foolish Things" (1935); "The Way You Look Tonight" (1936); "They Can't Take That Away From Me" (1937); "All The Things You Are" (1940).

[16]I have also identified the following songs and their copyright dates from which Stoppard excerpts lines: "Skater's Waltz" (first published 1882; copyright renewed 1980); "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" (1937); "I'm Into Something Good" (1964); "I'm A Believer" (1966); "A Whiter Shade of Pale" (1967); "You've Lost That Loving Feeling" (1971).

[17]Burkman discusses the absence of clearly distinguished heroes and villains in Pinter's plays.

[18]Pfister briefly outlines a number of these structuralist definitions of action: Hubler sees action "as the 'intentionally chosen but not causally defined transition from one situation to the next' . . . Bremond defines the elementary sequence within the course of action as a series of three steps that go from the situation that allows an action to take place, via the realisation of this possibility to a successful change in that

situation. In the same vein, Todorov describes the elementary structure of narrative as a transition from one balanced situation to another. Lotman characterises the 'event', a unit in the construction of the *sujet* that corresponds to our notion of 'action', as the 'transfer of a figure across the borders of a semantic field', and again it is possible to distinguish between three separate segments (the figure on the one side of the semantic field, the transfer across the border and the figure on the other side of the semantic field)" (197).

[19]Pinter also focuses on this phatic function of language; see Burton 18-22.

[20]Roventa-Frumusani notes the effect of "all semiotic codes (verbal and non-verbal)" in absurdist drama to produce "a sense of *logical uneasiness* and of *narrative discomfort*" (her italics 325), which seem closely related, if not comparable, to psychological dissonance.

[21]Hudgins quotes from an interview with Lawrence M Bersky in which Pinter declares that his plays are about dominance and subservience (106).

[22]Although Annie corrects Henry when he refers to Ford's play as Jacobean, retorting that it is Elizabethan, it is actually Carolinean.

[23]Worth draws an interesting parallel between Coward and Pinter, claiming that the latter resembles the former in the "area of doubt about identity and the truth of feeling." She notes how Coward was quick to appreciate Pinter: the 'genuine original' among the new playwrights: which she finds "hardly surprising : there are so many similarities of style and interest. They have the same feeling for streamlined form, the same sharp ear for lifelike idiom and stage speech, the same love of mimicry and burlesque . . . "

[24]Ziefman examines Stoppard's technique of "comic ambush" whose effect is to disorient and to undermine the audience's sense of what is "real."

[25]Burton cites Abercrombie and Page on the "non-realistic" quality of dramatic dialogue and then examines how Pinter's dialogue is "conversation-like," but nevertheless stylized (3-23). Elam compares dramatic and 'everyday' discourse by contrasting a "relatively idiomatic" passage from Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* and a transcript of "an actual cafe conversation." He reveals how Shepard's dialogue is "altogether better ordered and more coherent" than the transcript. He then examines the elements of syntactic orderliness, informational intensity , illocutionary purity and floor-apportionment control which distinguish dramatic dialogue from everyday conversation (178-82).

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